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Sack call for Remploy bosses

Workers at sheltered employer Remploy have demanded the resignation of two of its top bosses.

The calls, at a meeting with Remploy management last month, came after an "overwhelming" no confidence motion at the national conference of Remploy trades union members. Unions also plan to lobby parliament.

The GMB union said chairman Alan Pedder and financial director Bob Warner had "a hidden agenda of running down the Remploy factory network".

It said the cost of board members had doubled and numbers of senior managers had risen, while those of disabled workers had fallen well below the 6,000

figure agreed in a long-term strategy document in 2000.

Phil Davies, GMB national officer, said: "We want disabled people running this company."

The demands come only two months after a long-running pay dispute was resolved.

A Remploy spokeswoman said annual sales had risen by five per cent and nine factories were recently modernised.

Reploy was committed to implementing the long-term strategy, and the figure of 6,000 was "a matter of interpretation".

There had also been "a major increase in the number of people in open supported employment in other organisations".

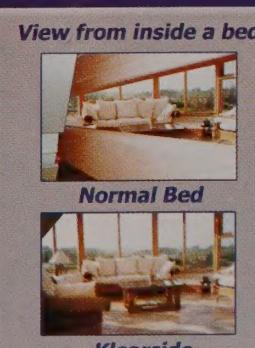
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On the cover: 200 campaigners lobbied parliament last month to call on the media to stop ridiculing people of restricted growth. They were supported by Patsy Calton MP and spoke to MPs including disabled people's minister Maria Eagle.

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Showdown

Protestors challenge charities to shut up shop

Disabled activists have staged direct action protests at the London headquarters of four leading disability charities in a call for them to shut up shop.

The Disabled People's Direct Action Network (DAN) says non disabled-run charities have become the main stumbling block to disabled people's freedom, running segregated institutions, speaking for them to government, and sending out messages that disabled people are powerless and in need of help.

The claims are strongly denied by Scope, RNIB, RNID and Mencap, which say they are committed to service-user participation and helping people to be independent.

Around 30 campaigners waved banners, plastered stickers, chanted slogans and stopped traffic over two days of protests in October, trailed by 60 police officers.

Demands for a debate on the street with chief executives were refused except at Mencap, where campaigners were invited in for talks and hot drinks.

Scope also declined to accept a wreath decorated with the words "RIP Scope".

Alan Holdsworth, DAN organiser, said: "We're asking chief executives to come out on the street and have a public debate, not in someone's office behind closed doors.

"Charities need to be cross-

impairment, they need to support the national disabled people's movement, and they need to be run by disabled people. They need to be more representative and accountable."

Sam, from Scotland, said: "Having two or three disabled people on the management committee doesn't represent an organisation for people with my disability. Disabled people are not being given the skills to run their own affairs. They are encouraged to rely on charities."

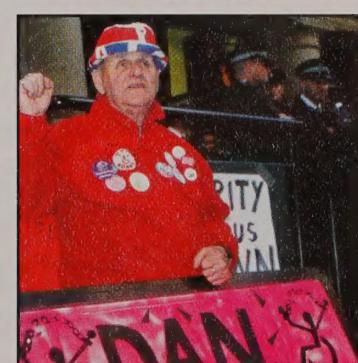
Tony Manwaring, Scope chief executive, accused DAN of focusing on rhetoric rather than real life experiences of service users, who had a right to choose their homes and education.

"The voice of disabled people is absolutely the strongest voice in Scope. We have a council with 18 trustees, ten of whom are disabled people. They sign off our strategies, budgets and key issues of policy."

The RNIB said charities would not need to exist in an ideal world where services which enable disabled people to participate were provided, but that was "not the case".

Both RNIB and RNID said DAN's protest was unrepresentative of their disabled members.

Jo Williams, Mencap chief executive, said: "There have been lots of changes already to make Mencap more inclusive, but we want to do even more."



Direct Action stations:
(from top, clockwise)
Demonstrators outside Scope's headquarters; DAN member with a symbolic wreath; the party moves to the RNIB; in the rain outside parliament.

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Pg 20-23

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Published by Scope

Editor Mary Wilkinson

editorial

News Editor John Pring

Reporters Nuala Calvi and Lucy Glynn

Layout Sub David Felton

Editorial Assistant Lucy Howard

Design/Production Editor Jamie Trounce

address

Disability Now, 6 Market Road London N7 9PW

Editorial: 020 7619 7323

Fax: 020 7619 7331

Minicom: 020 7619 7332

e-mail: editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

advertising

Advertising Manager

Richard Gresham

Tel: 020 7619 7336

e-mail: richard.gresham@scope.org.uk

Sales Executive

Patrick Durham-Matthews

Tel: 020 7619 7320

e-mail: patrick.durhammatthews@scope.org.uk

Sales Administrative

Assistant Suzan Hillman

Tel: 020 7619 7120

Fax: 020 7619 7331

marketing

Marketing Manager

Juliana Uduezue

Marketing Executive

Elizabeth Cowley

subscriptions

Customer Interface, Cary Court, Bancombe Trading Estate, Somerton, Somerset TA11 6TB

Tel: 0845 120 7001

e-mail: dnsubs@cisubs.co.uk

printing

Voluntary Sector Services, Centurion Press Ltd, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, Tel: 01923 891000

newstand distribution

If you have any problems obtaining a copy of *DN* through your newsagent or supermarket, please call Heidi Bush at MMC on 01483 211222 or email heidi.bush@mmc ltd.co.uk

alternative formats

Disability Now is also available on cassette, disk or via e-mail from Talking Newspapers Enterprises Ltd. For orders or queries, tel: 01435 862737. ISSN 0958-4676

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ABC 22,784 **PPA**
1/7/01 - 30/6/02

DN CAMPAIGN

NHS cannabis call

Two leading multiple sclerosis charities have called for cannabis-based drugs to be prescribed on the NHS, after a trial found they could be useful in easing some symptoms of the condition.

Although the Cannabinoids in MS (CAMS) trial found the drugs had a slight but insignificant effect on spasticity when measured on an independent assessment scale, a significant number of users reported an improvement in spasticity, spasms, pain and sleep quality.

There was also evidence of improved mobility, and the drugs caused no major side-effects.

The trial, supported by the Medical Research Council and

the MS Society, was the largest ever study of MS symptoms, with 657 people across the UK followed over two years.

The researchers concluded that cannabis-based drugs could be useful in treating some MS-related symptoms, but called for further research.

Mike O'Donovan, chief executive of the MS Society, said the results showed the difficulty of assessing MS treatments, but added: "These improvements to quality of life can make a significant difference to people with MS, whose choice of treatment is very limited."

He and MS Trust chief executive Chris Jones both called for treatment with cannabis-based

drugs to be available on the NHS and for further research.

A Department of Health spokeswoman said the study was "part of the ongoing debate" on the use of cannabis-based drugs.

But she repeated the government's promise that it will amend the law to allow their use if and when the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency approves an application from GW Pharmaceuticals to license its cannabis-based drug for MS symptoms.

To take part in DN's new cannabis survey, complete the form on our website at www.disabilitynow.org.uk or call 020 7619 7323



Fit to govern: government ministers David Blunkett (right) and Richard Caborn joined ex-Paralympic swimmer Chris Holmes at the House of Commons gym for the launch of a £5 million Inclusive Fitness Initiative*. The lottery-funded scheme will award grants to gyms to help disabled people access fitness programmes.

*www.inclusivefitness.org or tel: 0114 2572060

'Give us the bill'

Campaigners have lobbied parliament to demand the government fulfil its commitment to giving disabled people comprehensive civil rights.

Umbrella group Our Rights Now called on the government to immediately introduce its promised disability bill.

Members also promoted the Disabled People's Rights And Freedoms Bill, which covers human rights issues such as the right to life and to a sex life as well as civil rights.

Andy Rickell, ORN chair, said of the disability bill: "If it

is not in the Queen's Speech, it could be put off until 2005. If there's an election, there is a danger it might not get done.

"If they fail to meet their obligations, we'll make a big fuss about it. Increasingly, we're unconvinced of the current government's commitment to comprehensive civil rights."

Meanwhile, 112 MPs have signed an early day motion sponsored by Labour MP Roger Berry calling for the government to include a disability bill in its next legislative programme.

New law for hate crimes

A long-awaited new law will see tougher sentences for crimes motivated by hatred of a person's disability.

The government announced in October that the hate crime law will come through an amendment to the government's Criminal Justice Bill, which is currently working its way through parliament.

Laws already exist for magistrates and judges to increase sentences for crimes aggravated by hatred of the victim's race or

religion. This will now be extended to offences aggravated by hatred of disability or sexual orientation.

Baroness Scotland, a Home Office minister, said: "I hope that this will send a clear signal that these very serious offences will not be tolerated."

The announcement was welcomed by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), which said it was "as welcome as it is necessary".

A coalition of disability and

gay charities had been lobbying for the move (DN September), which was also backed by the Metropolitan Police.

A DRC survey earlier this year revealed more than one in five disabled people had experienced harassment in public because of their impairment.

A DRC spokesperson said: "For too long these devastating crimes have not been recognised in law or treated with the seriousness they deserve by police, prosecutors or the courts."

In brief

News access failure

The top ten UK newspaper websites all fail to meet minimum accessibility standards, according to a survey by computing and disability charity, AbilityNet.

The *Guardian* was the top performer, but still failed to meet basic levels of accessibility. Eight were "very inaccessible", with the *Sun* and the *News of the World* the worst. www.abilitynet.co.uk

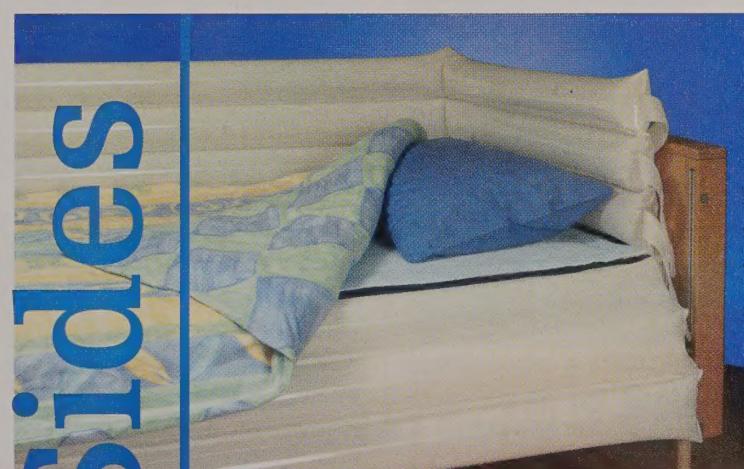
Form size slashed

The size of the application form for Attendance Allowance, a benefit for severely disabled people aged 65 and over, has been slashed from 37 to 19 pages.

The government said pilot schemes led to fewer appeals and medical evidence checks.

It is also testing a shorter Disability Living Allowance claim form. www.dwp.gov.uk

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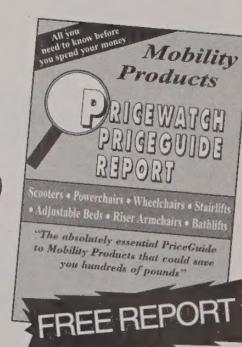
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A punishment to fit the crime

Between 1983 and 1993, scores of vulnerable adults were systematically abused in care homes near Slough. They finally received compensation in October. But their abusers escaped almost unscathed. This month, DN launches a new campaign to establish a more fitting punishment for those who harm people with learning difficulties and other vulnerable adults.

Our Justice for Survivors campaign has already won the backing of three leading disability charities as well as one of the best known organisations run by and for people with learning difficulties.

It aims to expose the gap between the maximum sentence faced by someone who ill-treats or neglects a child – ten years – and that faced by someone who ill-treats or neglects an adult with a learning difficulty – just two years.

Karen Spencer, chairperson of Central England People First, which campaigns for the rights of, and is run by, people with learning difficulties, said: "If the government respects people with learning difficulties, they should change the law and support this campaign."

Kathryn Stone, director of Voice UK, which supports victims of crime who have

learning difficulties, said: "In a civilised society, crimes of abuse and exploitation of vulnerable people are abhorrent. Sentences should be raised to reflect this."

She said the absence of an appropriate offence in law meant abusers escaped justice and the police failed to take such crimes seriously (*see case study right, below*).

David Congdon, head of external relations for Mencap, said the charity "wholeheartedly supports" DN's campaign, "to send out a clear signal to potential abusers that, if they ill-treat and neglect people with a learning disability, they should face far tougher prison sentences".

And Dr Jean Collins, director of Values Into Action, said: "I think a change in the law which would really point up that it is a serious crime to treat people with learning difficulties wrongly would be a really good step forward."

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The government's failure to correct the problem was highlighted by the Longcare case.

The High Court heard in October how a regime of abuse at two residential homes for adults with learning difficulties, run by a company called Longcare and its boss Gordon Rowe, was allowed to continue for 10 years under the nose of the local authority that was supposed to be inspecting the homes, near Slough.

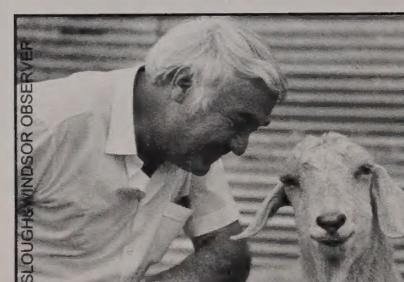
A confidential council report in 1994 concluded that Rowe had been raping, assaulting, drugging, starving and neglecting the residents.

Buckinghamshire County Council finally agreed to pay an estimated £1 million compensation to 54 former Longcare residents, because of its failure to prevent and halt the abuse.

But this civil case has served to highlight the government's failure to address the flaws in the criminal justice system.

More than six years ago, at the end of the trial of three former Longcare managers convicted of ill-treatment and neglect, Judge John Baker said the Mental Health Act had provided him with inadequate sentencing powers and called for a parliamentary review.

Angela Rowe, the widow of



Gordon Rowe, who had killed himself hours before he was to be charged, was jailed for just 30 months.

The court heard how she ordered a woman with Down's syndrome to eat meals outside as a punishment, pulled another woman with Down's syndrome down a flight of stairs by her hair, and "wilfully neglected" two residents by depriving them of toiletries to save money.

Another former manager was jailed for 15 months and a third was fined.

The following year, civil servant Tom Burgner, who led an independent inquiry into the case, called for a new offence of causing harm to or exploitation of a vulnerable adult, with a maximum penalty of ten years in prison, as with child neglect.

DN news editor, John Pring, whose new book discusses the Longcare case and the abuse of people with learning difficulties*, realised at the end of his research that nothing had been done, so DN has launched a campaign calling for a new law.



Then and now: (top) Stoke Place, a Longcare "home", (left) Gordon Rowe, and (above) families of abuse survivors outside the High Court in October.

After last month's High Court settlement, relatives of the former Longcare residents also backed our campaign.

Barrister June Raybaud, of Justice for Longcare Survivors, said tougher sentences would "ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service and the police take these matters seriously when they are reported to them".

The Department of Health told DN there were no plans to change the law, but declined to comment further.

*John Pring's book, *Silent Victims*, is published by Gibson Square Books, priced £14.99. ISBN: 1903933196

of ill-treatment or wilful neglect by someone who "has the care of" a person without capacity, again with a maximum two years in prison. Consultation on both bills is continuing.

What DN is calling for

A new, arrestable offence of harming or exploiting a vulnerable adult, with a maximum penalty of ten years in prison.

'My blouse turned red with the blood I was losing...'

Dorothy Thomson, Longcare resident



Dorothy Thomson was one of the first residents of Gordon Rowe's Longcare homes. She arrived in late 1983, after spending more than 20 years in a long-stay hospital.

During the next seven years, she was mistreated by Rowe and his staff and saw other residents physically assaulted, neglected and starved.

In my book, Dorothy describes one particular incident of abuse: "I had very long hair and he got hold of the little bits at the back of me hair. He pulled my head right back right across the gravel.

"And then I had this pink blouse on and it was changing colour from pink to red virtually because of the blood I was losing.

"He pushed me down on the grass, which was wet, and

I was shivering with shock, and hypothermia was also working in."

She later talks about another resident, Jackie. "She would literally scream at the meal table because she was petrified of Gordon Rowe... She would scream and she was pushed outside and made to stand outside in the cold and the rain to eat her food."

Dorothy complained to her sister, and then her social worker, after Rowe brutally assaulted her in 1991.

After leaving Longcare, she moved to a flat of her own in Hampshire, where she now lives independently with her husband, Jamie (pictured above).

Three years after she moved, the abusive regime was finally exposed after a council report was leaked to the press.

Trapped in a baking hot car

This August, at the height of the heatwave, a physically disabled man with severe learning difficulties was left in a car all afternoon by his care worker.

The man was not given any water and was simply left in the car without anyone checking on him.

Voice UK, which advised his mother in the case, says the police claimed that no crime had been committed

because he was not "falsely imprisoned", because he was not locked in – even though he was physically unable to leave the car.

Kathryn Stone, director of Voice UK, said: "We have to send out very clear messages to people about their responsibilities and their duty of care to vulnerable people.

"You would be arrested if you had done the same thing to a dog."

Weblinks and contacts:

Department of Health www.doh.gov.uk

Lord Chancellor's Department www.lcd.gov.uk

Mencap www.mencap.org.uk

People First www.peoplefirst.org.uk

Voice UK email: voiceuk@clara.net or visit www.voiceuk.clara.net

DN's campaign contact john.pring@scope.org.uk

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League table block-out

Schools which top the league tables are selecting non-disabled children in order to get good Ofsted gradings, contrary to government policies on social inclusion.

The claim was made at a meeting of the Education and Skills Select Committee at which Ofsted was quizzed on its new duty to monitor implementation of anti-discrimination laws in schools.

Liberal Democrat member Paul Holmes MP said Ofsted statistics showed that academi-

cally successful schools at the top of league tables usually have "well below the national average levels of children with special educational needs".

"Clearly covert or overt selection is often going on contrary to government policies on social inclusion," he said.

The Department for Education and Skills said it was making "good progress" towards the publication of value-added measures which would reduce adverse incentives which might skew school admissions.

Minority failure inevitable

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is "doomed to fail" its legal responsibilities to ethnic minority disabled people, according to a new report.

Under the Race Relations Act, public bodies have to take positive steps to rule out racial discrimination and monitor themselves to see if their activities could lead to race inequality.

But according to the report*, by Disability Alliance (DA), the DWP has no strategy for making the benefits system user-friendly, actively marketing benefits entitlements, or collecting reliable statistics about

ethnic minority disabled and carer benefits take-up.

Lorna Reith, DA chief executive, said: "Local authorities have been doing this for years. It's fairly appalling that central government – and the DWP in particular – is so behind."

The report said the DWP "assumes it can rely on an under-funded, under-resourced and vastly over-stretched voluntary sector" to provide practical help for claimants.

A DWP spokeswoman said it was looking at ways to improve customer monitoring.

* *Out of Sight*, tel: 020 7247 8776



Sainsbury's has launched new posters and in-store leaflets and is also using blue paint. Asda and Sainsbury have trialled a voice warning system.

Tesco is planning posters and in-store leaflets, monitors bays and uses blue paint.

Safeway is only considering posters and in-store leaflets.

Douglas Campbell, executive

director of the Disabled Drivers' Association, said: "Disabled people keep telling me they want action now. We are not moving fast enough".

- A review of access has begun in the Houses of Parliament to help it meet its Disability Discrimination Act duties. A report, due next month, will recommend improvements.

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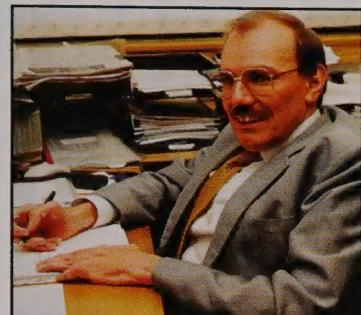
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End for DRC

The government is to press ahead with plans to scrap the Disability Rights Commission and replace it with a single equality body covering disability, sex, age, religion, sexuality and race discrimination by 2006.

The announcement, by Patricia Hewitt, Minister for Women and Equality, came after an 18-month consultation, during which disability groups raised concerns that their issues could be sidelined in a single body.

But she said the government had yet to decide on "key issues" such as how the new "Commission for Equality and Human Rights" would be run and structured. A working group will draw up details for a white paper in the spring.



Bert Massie, Disability Rights Commission (DRC) chairman (above), welcomed the announcement but said: "I would have hoped that after 18 months of consultation the government would have been in a position to decide on a structure for the new commission."

"It will be an impossible challenge for the task force to achieve in four months what the government has been

unable to resolve over a much longer period."

The government's statement made particular reference to concerns about the "distinctive aspects of the disability rights agenda and the relatively recent establishment of the DRC".

Andy Rickell, chair of the British Council of Disabled People, said this showed disability organisations had been effective in getting the message across about disabled people's particular concerns.

"It's now important disabled people get their voices heard in the taskforce. We need a disability strand within the single body which is governed by disabled commissioners and does not receive less funding than the DRC."



Indi-pendence day: Wendy Plues, from Surrey, has become the first person in England to have an assistance dog funded as part of her care package. Surrey social services will pay for vet bills, food and insurance for Indi, a five-year-old Labrador trained by Canine Partners. www.caninepartners.co.uk

DN CAMPAIGN



Campaign fires up

ment would be £262m a year.

DA will find out the precise number of disabled children receiving higher rate Disabled Living Allowance and DN will seek a meeting with Minister for Children Margaret Hodge.

"Disabled people have been calling for a fair deal for four years," said DN editor Mary Wilkinson. "We are not giving up."

Over 2,200 severely disabled people and 21 organisations now support DN's campaign.

Swimmers frozen out

Disabled people say they are being forced away from their local pool because the charitable trust which runs it will not keep the water warm enough.

Older people and those with conditions such as MS use a remedial session at Bath Sports and Leisure Centre on Thursdays during which the water is heated to 32 degrees.

But new owner Aquaterra

Leisure says it will no longer provide the warmer temperatures.

Ann Tweedale, 62, told DN: "A solemn commitment was made by the council to provide warm water for disabled swimmers.

"This promise has now been broken. As I have MS, I always notice the improvement that water exercise makes to my

condition. I am not the only user of the Sports Centre who will tell a similar tale of rage and disgust."

Alison Baker, Bath and North East Somerset Leisure Manager, said guidelines recommended public pools should not be above 30 degrees.

She said consultations to look at other solutions were going on.

DN is relaunching its winter fuel campaign with another all-party early day motion (edm) in the new Parliament, thanks to Labour MP Roger Berry. 156 MPs supported his edm two years ago.

The new edm is being extended to cover children as well as severely disabled adults under 60 – just over 1.3m people, estimates the charity Disability Alliance (DA).

The cost of supplying them with the £200 winter fuel pay-

Building regulations to demand level access

New government guidance should ensure all new buildings have level entrances and other access features.

The proposals* from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will also mean owners have to take "reasonable steps" to improve access when existing buildings are altered.

The new regulations will bring Part M of the Building Regulations into line with a new

British Standard on access. They will also meet one of the recommendations of the Disability Rights Task Force when they come into force in May, 2004.

Sarah Langton-Lockton, chief executive of the Centre for Accessible Environments, said: "The new Part M marks a real step forward for inclusive design and will encourage buildings that are better for all to use."

*www.odpm.gov.uk

In brief

Ambulance advance

St John Ambulance has won praise from the charity Diabetes UK after lifting its ban on people with diabetes working as ambulance drivers.

The blanket ban meant people with insulin-treated diabetes could not apply for a licence.

Applicants must now complete an individual medical assessment.

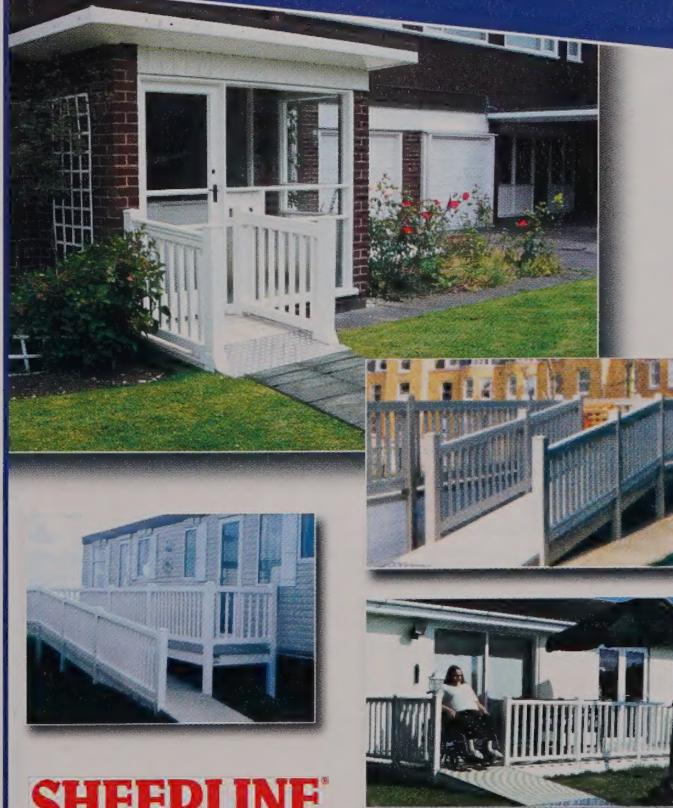
Ali G in da trouble

The Broadcasting Standards Commission has upheld a complaint about comedian Ali G's use of offensive language about disabled people.

It found his impression of a "spaz" and language used by his fictional character, Bruno, although intended satirically, "had exceeded acceptable boundaries".

The complaint about April's Channel 4 show was made by DN reader Sharon Baker.

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GLAD to reach 50

London's only pan-disability organisation celebrated its 50th birthday last month.

Greater London Action on Disability (GLAD) started as an organisation "for" disabled people, who were offered "a canary and a sack of coal" according to a new biography*.

Now it is a campaigning organisation run by disabled people, with 72 member groups in 28 London boroughs, providing information, disability equality training, taping and braille services.

The Greater London Authority consults GLAD ahead of the big charities, claims Reg McLaughlin, its chief executive officer. "We now sit at the top table.

"We discuss with senior politicians issues that relate to disabled people," he said.

His aim in the next 50 years



As it used to be: Blue (Invalid) cars outside 336 Brixton Road, 1985

is to close GLAD down.

"If we could get the services we need to enable us to live as equal citizens and get the support we need to do that and have that embedded in rights and legislation, then our cam-

paigning role would be finished," he said.

*From *Caged Birds to Campaigners*, by Diane Langford, £7.50 from GLAD, 336 Brixton Road, London SW97AA, tel: 020 7346 5800.

National centre back in business

The National Centre for Independent Living, the body which promotes and supports direct payments to put disabled people in charge of their own care, has been re-launched after more than a year on ice.

NCIL, now an independent company, was formerly part of the British Council of Disabled People.

It has received £9m over three years from the Department of Health, £4.5m of which has been granted to 45 voluntary organisations to build support schemes for direct payments over the next 18 months.

At the launch, Francis Hasler, NCIL's new chief executive, said it would campaign, among other things, for disabled peo-

ple's right to independent living.

"Direct payments are gathering pace at a breathless speed. We've got a good framework, but people are still not getting what they want.

"We know it's a lottery. We know people are still going into residential care because their resources aren't there to keep them in the community."

All clear for rail access deadline

The Department for Transport is finally ready to set a deadline for all rail vehicles in England, Scotland and Wales to become accessible.

New trains already have to meet access regulations, but campaigners have been waiting for the government to set a date by which all existing rail vehicles must also be accessible.

A consultation* will end on 26 January, but the government has suggested this "end date" might not be until 2025.

In a further move on transport access, the government has announced plans to implement the taxi regulations of the Disability Discrimination Act.

But it only announced a "first phase" of English and Welsh authorities that must introduce accessible taxis over a ten year period from 2010.

Alun Francis, senior campaigns manager for RADAR, said he was disappointed at how long this would take and that this "first

phase" would only cover areas with a population of over 120,000, major transport interchanges or tourist attractions, or those with their own "mandatory" policies which have already led to 100 per cent accessible taxis.

Other authorities, including many rural areas, will only have voluntary guidance, with regulations possibly extended if this is not effective.

These proposals will also be subject to public consultation.

- Meanwhile, disabled drivers will find it easier to park in central London, after the boroughs of Camden, the Corporation of London, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster, agreed to simplify rules for Blue Badge holders, following pressure from the London Assembly.

Badge holders will be able to stay for three hours in Blue Badge bays, for one hour after their time has expired in pay and display areas, and for up to 20 minutes on yellow lines.

*www.dft.gov.uk

Little and large both winners in work awards

A tiny family business and a bank with over 4,000 employees are Leading the Way in employing disabled people.

Colin Stewart Upholsterers, at Crossgates in Fife, Scotland, which employs two people, both disabled, won "a very special commendation" in this year's awards.

"It is inspirational that such a small family business can make such an impression on the local area," said Ray Fletcher, a director of Remploy, the company that supports disabled employees and runs the awards.

"Disabled people make very good employees," said Colin Stewart. "It just needs patience and a willingness to work round their disability." He advised other small employers to "Go for it."

National overall winner was the Northern Rock Bank, for its thorough approach to employing disabled people. In the last three years disabled



Winning combination: (from left) Colin Stewart, Maria Eagle MP and Alec Imrie

employees have more than tripled, to 144.

Other winners were trucking and warehousing company Christian Salvesen, the Government's Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea, and Ringley Chartered Surveyors in North London.

Minister for Disabled People Maria Eagle presented the awards.

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News Review

A monthly round-up of news from the mainstream media

'Shed shelves shows'

Chicken Shed*, the inclusive theatre group, announced it had suspended all major productions for the first six months of 2004.

It blamed fundraising problems and the Arts Council's failure to provide core funding for artistic work.

Its education and training work with children and young people will continue, though.

*www.chickensed.org.uk

Consulation begins

The government launched a three month consultation on how to improve mental health services for people from ethnic minorities.

As part of its plans, it wants to recruit 500 new community development workers by 2006.

The Commission for Racial Equality said there was "an abundance of evidence to show that inequalities exist among ethnic minority communities both in service delivery and provision".

*www.doh.gov.uk/consultations/live

Measles outbreak risk

One of the researchers who first suggested the MMR vaccine might trigger autism said there was now "unequivocal evidence" that no such link existed.

Dr Simon Lurch, a consultant gastroenterologist, said the low uptake of the vaccine had left the UK on the brink of major measles outbreaks.

Dr Andrew Wakefield, a co-author of the 1998 study that first suggested a link, said he still believed there was a connection.

Care 'rationing' must end

The new president of the Association of Directors of Social Services called for the replacement of outdated laws that force councils to use means-testing and eligibility criteria to "ration" social care to only the most "deserving" adults.

Andrew Cozens called for a new Community Care Act to force local authorities to promote the "well-being" of their communities, backed up by a new framework of human and civil rights.

DN CAMPAIGN



Ryanair slammed...

A disabled teenager who flew to Italy with his family to celebrate his court victory in a ground-breaking discrimination case had his holiday ruined when an airline smashed part of his wheelchair.

Anthony Ford-Shubrook, from Harrow, Middlesex, who had just finished his GCSEs, arrived at Pisa on 9 September to find Ryanair staff had destroyed one of the metal wheels of his powered wheelchair and its battery box.

DN Extra reported in September how Anthony used the Disability Discrimination Act to win a place at a college which had told him he was a safety risk.



His wheelchair has now been damaged at least five times by airlines, but his mother, Catherine Ford, said the latest incident was the worst.

It ruined all but four days of their two-week holiday and the airline offered no help in find-

ing a replacement wheel.

Ryanair eventually apologised for the "inconvenience", but paid just £124.28 for the new wheel and battery box, and nothing for their extra costs or compensation for the ruined holiday.

Mrs Ford said Ryanair had shown "utter contempt" towards its disabled passengers. "Anthony was absolutely sickened by it. It meant his whole independence was taken away from his holiday."

A Ryanair spokesman said the airline had paid compensation in line with the Warsaw Convention, which offers minimum levels of damages. He declined to comment further.

...as easyJet stops disabled students from boarding flight

Students with learning difficulties have demanded that the airline easyJet changes its policies for disabled passengers after they were stopped from boarding a flight because they "didn't have enough carers" with them.

The 13 students and five staff from Pengwern, a Mencap college in north Wales, were travelling from Liverpool to Geneva for a football tournament.

EasyJet has a policy of one carer for every two disabled people. On the return journey, they were told they could not board the plane as they did not have enough carers.

After a long debate, which delayed the flight, easyJet finally allowed the team onto the plane.

The students have now written to easyJet to challenge its rules and offer their help in rewriting them.

Pengwern Student Council members David Byrne, Andy Brown, Richard Ferris-Jones and Steven Riley, said: "It was embarrassing. People who were kept waiting were staring at us like we were the culprits."

An easyJet spokeswoman said check-in staff were "over-zealous" and apologised "unreservedly" for the embarrassment.

The company has invited the students to work with them to "develop" the policy.



Making Sense: deafblind children and their families presented a charter to the Department for Education and Skills to highlight the needs of children who have both hearing and sight impairments. Thousands have signed the Sense charter, which includes calls for better pre-school support.

Cost to trump need in Scots learning bill

A new education bill in Scotland* will lead to children with special educational needs being assessed on the basis of cost rather than need, say campaigners.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) Bill replaces the existing Record of Need (RoN) system with Coordinated Support Plans (CSPs).

Charities welcomed plans to standardise the system, reduce bureaucracy, and create a new appeals tribunal.

But Kate Higgins, of Capability Scotland, said: "This legislation gives local authorities a get-out because they don't have to do anything that is not practicable on the grounds of cost.

"Children with profound disabilities could fall to the bottom of the pile because their needs

are the most expensive.

"The CSP has a higher qualification bar so potentially fewer children will have it than had an RoN and it is the only legal guarantee that you will get anything."

The National Autistic Society Scotland was concerned that the bill removes the statutory duty on education authorities to formally assess every child to establish whether they have any additional medical or other support needs.

A Scottish Executive spokeswoman said the bill required all education authorities to identify and address additional support needs for learning for all children.

She said support for children who currently have RoNs should not change unless their needs change.

*www.scotland.gov.uk

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Call for new standards

MPs have called for a new national body to oversee equipment services for disabled and older people.

The call came in a Commons early day motion (edm) tabled by Labour MP Roger Berry.

It has already been signed by more than 50 MPs and is backed by equipment campaigns consortium emPOWER.

The edm also called for the government to act on the recommendations of two highly critical Audit Commission reports in 2000 and 2002, which called for urgent action to

improve equipment services.

Sam Gallop, chair of emPOWER, said: "All we are asking for is our fair share of all the very welcome additional new funding for the NHS."

He said prosthetics funding was actually falling in real terms.

A Department of Health spokeswoman said there were no plans for a national body, although the Audit Commission's recommendations were "under constant review".

She said responsibility for community equipment had

been devolved to local areas.

The edm was launched after an emPOWER conference in October, at which the British Society of Rehabilitation Medicine launched new standards* for rehabilitating limbless people, backed by health minister John Hutton MP.

Mr Gallop said: "It is a 200 per cent positive step forward. Once you have national standards you can seek out and solve national inequities."

*Details on the standards and how to order the report from www.bsrm.co.uk

Clear view for footie fans

Disabled football fans have welcomed the publication of a new access guide* which they hope will put an end to stadium boycotts.

The Football Foundation guide has been produced with the help of the National Association of Disabled Supporters (NADS)** and states that "disabled people must have a clear view at all times".

It sets standards for seating, entrance design and car parking and will act as a blueprint for architects, designers and local authorities.

Gary Deards, vice-chair of NADS, said that the guide was a "significant step forward" and



It is hoped the new guide will end blocked view nightmares

would hopefully mean an end to restricted views of the pitch for disabled people.

*Accessible Stadia, www.footballfoundation.org.uk
**www.nads.org.uk

In brief

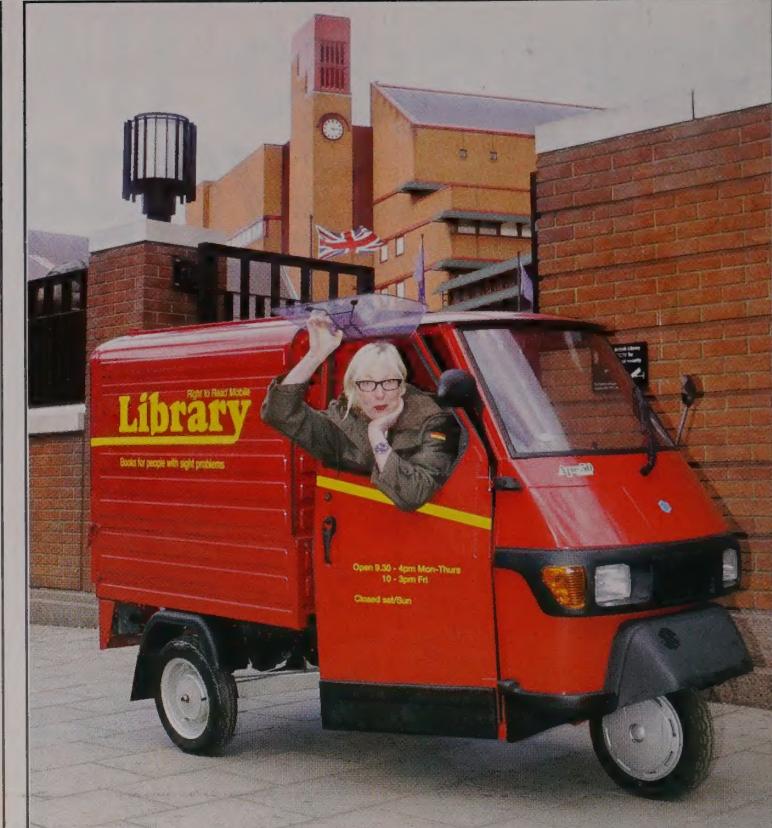
AbilityNet

Disability charity AbilityNet has won a contract to carry out IT access audits, provide equipment advice, assessments, training and support to help disabled people access learndirect* courses.

*www.learndirect.co.uk

Correction

In DN October, we said London's Liberty festival was organised by Greater London Action on Disability (GLAD) and the Greater London Assembly. In fact, Liberty was run by GLAD and the Greater London Authority.



Little and large: A new campaign aims to highlight the tiny proportion of books published in formats accessible to visually impaired people.

An RNIB report* has found that over 95 per cent of books are never made available in forms such as large print, audio or braille.

The charity is one of 14 organisations that have joined to form the new Right to Read Alliance, which will call for more books to be published in different formats. To highlight the campaign, comedian Jenny Éclair posed with a joke mobile library outside the British Library. *Overdue, www.rnib.org.uk

European Year will start rights campaign

The European Commission has launched an action plan aimed at promoting the rights of disabled people across the European Union.

The six-year plan, which will run from 2004, is intended to build on the European Year of Disabled People. Its first phase will focus on employment issues.

The plan also aims to ensure that the directive on equal treatment in employment and occupation, which is supposed to have been introduced in law by all European Union (EU) members by this month, is implemented properly.

There will also be reports every two years on the "overall situation of people with disabilities" in the enlarged

EU, starting in 2005.

Anna Diamantopoulou, commissioner for employment and social affairs, said: "The European Year... is a starting point, not a one-off event. This action plan will ensure that the results and momentum of the European Year will be maintained in years to come."

Lib Dem MEP Liz Lynne, vice-chair of the European Parliament's All Party Disability Intergroup, said the action plan was a "step in the right direction" but was not "strong enough" on those that haven't implemented the directive.

She has also called on the Commission to bring forward a directive on wider rights for disabled people.

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Down's abortion fears

Disabled people and their relatives have raised fears that new NHS guidelines on screening for Down's syndrome could lead to more abortions.

The guidance on the routine care of healthy pregnant women, from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE)*, says all women should be offered one of a series of recommended screening tests for Down's syndrome.

But the guidelines have sparked fierce criticism.

A group of 13 parents of children with Down's syndrome sent a letter to *DN*, saying they were "greatly concerned".

"Unless the standard of knowledge and ethics (in terms of respect for the lives of these human beings) is greatly and very rapidly improved, we will see an enormous increase in unnecessary abortions, but perhaps this is in fact what the pol-



icy is aimed at."

Anya Souza (above, left), who has Down's syndrome and took part in a protest at an international conference on screening in May (*DN Extra*, June), said she was opposed to screening and called for better information for prospective parents.

A NICE spokesperson said: "We are very clear that we are making absolutely no judgement

on the value of people with Down's syndrome in this guideline." But she confirmed that NICE was in favour of screening. She said anyone with comments should contact NICE**.

*www.nice.org.uk

**Write to NICE at MidCity Place, 71 High Holborn, London WC1V 6NA, tel 020 7067 5800, fax 020 7067 5801 or email nice@nice.nhs.uk

Diversity drive

Disabled people are being targeted as part of a £3 million drive to increase the diversity of the National Health Service.

The government is funding a series of pilot schemes to attract disabled people and those from ethnic minorities and underprivileged backgrounds to work in healthcare.

A Department of Health spokesperson said projects would tackle current discrepancies such as increasing the low number of disabled medical students.

The British Medical Journal (BMJ) has also called on the government, the royal colleges and the General Medical Council (GMC), to do more to help disabled medical students and ensure both disabled students and doctors are given the support they are entitled to.

It said a lack of role models is preventing disabled people

from joining the profession. "The introduction of anti-discrimination legislation has a yet failed to help health professionals with disabilities," the journal said in an editorial.

But in a letter to the BMJ Peter Rubin, chairman of the GMC education committee, said the GMC does not stop disabled people from becoming doctors. "We believe student with a wide range of disabilities can, and do, successfully complete the medical curriculum.

"Being in a wheelchair, for example, should not itself be a bar to studying medicine," he said.

Meanwhile, NHS Scotland has announced a partnership with the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) to ensure more disabled people are recruited and also to make sure services suit disabled people's needs.

More zeds for sleepy heads

A new survey has found as many as nine in ten disabled adults slept better after buying an electrically operated adjustable bed.

The research*, supervised by an orthopaedic surgeon, found 92 per cent of people with arthritis who used the bed said it improved their sleep, and 93

per cent of people with leg oedema said it improved their circulation.

The survey of 1,468 people who had bought a Willowbrook adjustable bed found it could help the symptoms of arthritis, back pain, poor circulation, emphysema and bronchitis.

Nick Adcock, managing director of Willowbrook Adjustable Beds, said: "The results showed most patients do benefit from an adjustable bed and that a comfortable night's rest is paramount to their improving condition."

*For a copy of the survey tel 01905 642200

Widows may lose aid

Campaigners are warning that widows of more than 200 people with haemophilia, who died after being infected with hepatitis C caused by contaminated blood, could be excluded from a government aid package.

Representatives of the Haemophilia Society met health minister Melanie Johnson in October to ask for payments to be guaranteed for relatives and dependants of those who died from liver cancer and liver disease.

Health Secretary John Reid (right) announced in August that the government would offer financial assistance to people infected by hepatitis C as a result of being given blood products by the NHS in the 1970s and 1980s.

But the charity is worried that the Department of Health



(DoH) will follow the lead of the Scottish Executive, which said dependants of those who died would not be compensated.

Karen Pappenheim, chief executive of the charity, said: "It seems inconceivable that the government could even consider excluding their dependants from this scheme, yet we fear this is what is being considered."

A DoH spokesperson said details of the scheme were still being worked out.

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Game over

British learning disabled athletes are to be left at home while their disabled teammates compete in the 2004 Paralympic Games.

The International Paralympic Committee ruled earlier this year that learning disabled athletes could only compete in non-medal "exhibition" events, following cheating at the Sydney 2000 games.

This means very few learning disabled British athletes will now be selected for the games, because the British Paralympic Association (BPA) has ruled that a learning disabled athlete will only be able to go to Athens if he or she does not take the place of another disabled athlete who has qualified for a full medal event.

A BPA spokeswoman said this means that probably only "two or three swimmers" will now go to Athens.

"The association would like to see all elite athletes given an equal chance but cannot sacrifice one group's medal aspirations."

Bernard Atha, president of the International Sports Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities in Europe, said the exclusion of learning disabled athletes was "morally wrong" and "discriminatory".

The news comes as research by the University of Ulster showed that this year's Irish Special Olympics led to more positive attitudes towards learning disabled people and athletes.



PICTURES: GRAHAM BOOL

Bowled over: Clive Gulley competes in the Open Pairs Final at the HSA 2003 National Wheelchair Championships, where he and his partner Chris Gibson lost by two points (15-17) to James Smith and Ivan Prior. The championships were hosted by the British Wheelchair Sports Foundation at Stoke Mandeville stadium in October and included athletics, basketball, powerlifting, rugby and table tennis. Pictured right is wheelchair racer Richard Schabel.



Basketball u-turn

Great Britain's women's wheelchair basketball team are to compete at the 2004 Paralympics, following a U-turn by the British Paralympic Association (BPA).

The team had qualified for the games under international competition rules, but the BPA ruled them out because its Paralympic policy says a sport should finish in the top half of the field.

But now, as part of its policy to promote women's sport, the BPA has given the team the go-ahead, providing it meets cer-

tain criteria concerning the condition of the team.

Joe Fletcher, chairman of Great Britain's Wheelchair Basketball Association (GBWBA), said: "This is a tremendous step forward. Both organisations are now clear as to the targets which must be exceeded by our athletes who wish to be selected to the team."

Team manager Charlie Bethel said he was "extremely pleased". "All we have to do now is make sure we have the funding to get them there."

Cp footie team off to Athens

England's cerebral palsy football team have qualified for the Paralympic Games after finishing eighth in the CP World Cup in Argentina.

The team beat Portugal 2-1 to take Europe's third Paralympic qualifying spot. England only needed a draw to reach the Paralympics, thanks to their superior goal difference,

and took the lead with a perfectly executed Gary Davies free kick.

Portugal equalised in the middle of the first half but England stayed calm and went 2-1 up when Junior Gordon smashed home a corner from eight yards.

In the second half, England faced a wave of attacks but held on to win.

Technical director Paul Harrison said the squad, with an average age of 22, gained valuable experience ahead of next year's Paralympic Games.

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Whose line is it anyway?

Facilitated Communication offers an apparent lifeline to many severely disabled people. But sceptics worry that the controversial means of communication is open to abuse, reports John Pring

Maresa points the way', read the apparently uncontroversial headline on the cover of the August edition of *DN Extra*.

It accompanied a picture of 18-year-old Maresa MacKeith, who is severely disabled with cerebral palsy, and her personal assistant.

The picture related to a news story about a Carlton TV documentary, which told how Maresa had been unable to communicate her thoughts until she and her mother, and later her PAs, began to use the technique of Facilitated Communication (FC).

Under the system, a trained "facilitator" supports the hand of the disabled person as she points to letters, words, pictures or symbols on a board.

But Maresa's story turned out to be not quite as uncontroversial as we first thought.

Chris Channon MBE, who is also severely disabled with cerebral palsy, contacted *DN* to express his deep unease after watching the documentary several times.

He remembered Maresa from a time before she began to use FC, when she was a pupil at a special school in Nottingham and he was a regular school visitor.

He says he was amazed at what he saw in the documentary and the claims that she had now taken her A-levels and was hoping to read English at university, particularly because, he says, she had never shown any signs of such intelligence at the special school.

He noticed Maresa's finger was moving across the board, with the help of her mother's guiding hand, "with a speed and accuracy that most one-fingered typists like myself can only dream of".

"This continued even when Maresa wasn't looking at her spelling board," he says. "I found this truly remarkable, as cerebral palsy plays havoc with a person's hand-eye coordination.

"I am not doing this maliciously. I just want people to be wary of the claims that are being made."

Maresa's mother, Caroline,



Enjoying new freedoms: (above) Maresa with mum Caroline, and (right), how we originally covered the story

agrees that FC can be "abused" if the facilitator is not properly trained and unconsciously tries to force the communication.

But she says: "Maresa didn't have any communication before, except expressions. For her (FC) has just opened up the whole world. She couldn't direct her life at all before. It completely changed her life."

She has many anecdotes to prove that Maresa really is the one communicating, rather than the facilitator.

On one occasion, while at school, Maresa became very annoyed with her facilitator and started swearing at her through FC. The facilitator became so upset that she complained to Maresa's tutor.

"There were people who were

sparked opposition from educationalists who insist that whatever communication is taking place is coming from the facilitator and not the disabled person.

Richard Mills, director of research for the National Autistic Society, says: "It is very controversial and overall I think there is very little evidence of FC being of any use in autism."

He says trials have been "uniformly negative", although he accepts there "may be a very small subgroup" of people with both autism and a movement impairment for whom "something like FC" can be "helpful".

"A facilitator may be helpful in some cases, provided it was subject to very strict safeguards,



She says it is easy to prove that FC can work, as there are many examples of people who were not able to communicate before using the technique and can now type independently.

"I think it could help an enormous amount of people but it is not some kind of miracle cure and it is not a quick fix." Proper training is vital, she says.

And there are safeguards, she adds, for instance asking the disabled person to point independently to signs saying "yes" or "no" to show the answer was correct.

Anne Emerson has been researching FC for a PhD since 1995. "For some people it is possible to show the collaboration is a little bit of the facilitator and a great deal of the communicator and for other people it is more fluctuating," she says.

"I obviously hope that people will start to accept it because I think it could be a very real breakthrough in our understanding of disability and our ability to help people with disability to communicate more fully. But I think there is a long way to go."

- Contact Anne Emerson at ememug@lineone.net
- For training, contact Marion Stanton at marion.stanton@virgin.net
- Bolton Institute, tel: 01204 900600
- The Facilitated Communication Institute at Syracuse University in the US is at <http://soeweb.syr.edu/thefci>

'Facilitated Communication has opened up the whole world. Maresa couldn't direct her life at all before. It completely changed her life'

sceptical when she started at school. People do not understand it. That is why they are sceptical. But anyone who has really worked with Maresa is not sceptical."

Hazel Wood, for instance, is a special educational needs coordinator at Ellis Guilford School in Nottingham, which Maresa attended until two years ago. "From what I saw with Maresa, FC certainly did work. Maresa was doing the communicating."

Maresa passed six GCSEs, and, as she had more than one facilitator, she was the only one who attended all the lessons. The exams must have been her work, says Wood. "For the school, it was a really positive experience. She was an inspiration."

FC has many determined supporters, but it has also

but I think without significant safeguards it is dangerous and should be discouraged in autism."

Mills was asked earlier this year to help with a police abuse inquiry, in which an allegation was made by an autistic person through FC. But he says the chances of it proceeding to court are "remote" because any defence barrister would "just attack the case based on the validity of the research".

Marion Stanton, who lectures on FC at Bolton Institute of Higher Education, says the NAS's attitude towards FC is "very unfortunate".

"Some people with autism might benefit and some might not. I would love to talk to them about it. The problem is, a lot of people do not understand what it is and some people practice it badly."

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ILLUSTRATIONS: CLARE CURTIS

Not beneficial if you want to work

I was interested to read about how the benefits system makes working so difficult (Share your problems, *DN* November). I have faced a similar problem this year when I had to stop a job I loved because my pay was raised to over £20 a week.

I have corresponded with my MP and the Minister for

Disabled People over the unfairness of this, but have received no acknowledgement that the benefits system is not flexible enough to allow many disabled people to do some work.

So I have decided to compile a dossier of stories of people whose impairments mean they

can only do a few hours work a week, for whom this work is necessary for their self-esteem but who are unable to undertake it because of the benefits system. Maybe if the Minister could see that the Permitted Working rules were detrimental to a whole raft of people, she would be more inclined to look at changing them.

Would it be possible to use *DN* as a "care of" address for people who contact me?

Rebecca Shtasel
Brighton, Sussex
We would be happy to pass on letters to you - Editor

Quad bike maybe, Lapland no

I wanted to let you know of the really helpful service I received from JCB kids toys.

My son Barnaby wanted a toy Quad bike for his fifth birthday. He had a little go in a department store but because his leg control is limited he could not control the foot switch.

I contacted JCB to see if they had a similar bike with hand control. They immediately said "We will see if we can get one adapted".

Within minutes a manager called back to check the details and promised to contact the company who produce the

bike. Since then, he has called regularly to keep me updated.

It may be that they cannot help, but the immediate offer to try and the excellent service has been truly wonderful.

In contrast, I received details from Nectar of a trip to see Santa in Lapland, something we desperately wanted to do.

I called the helpline to be told "You cannot take a disabled child in a wheelchair". When I complained, they refused to put me through to a manager or give me the head office telephone number.

Kate Lister (email)

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Carers on ICA get £1 an hour

The Invalid Care Allowance (ICA) is paid to carers who give 35 hours care for a reward of £43.15 – just over £1 per hour.

It clearly shows the importance this and former governments put on carers in this country. If they are really interested in helping disabled people obtain essential care, they would offer the minimum wage they themselves have set.

Qualification for the ICA is a minefield of rules. I would suggest to the government that they cease ICA and pay people in receipt of the Disability Living higher rate care and mobility components the pathetic amount.

Carers, if they are able to qualify for the benefit, do not give care for monetary reward but out of dedication. When will any government with their empty promises see the importance of carers?

V J Barlow (e-mail)

Conservatives make positive u-turn

As Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability, I was very interested to read the announcement by Nigel Waterson MP (*DN* November) that the Conservatives are considering extending winter fuel payments to severely disabled people under the age of 60, calling it a "glaring inequality".

While this would be a welcome conversion to common sense, it would also be an amazing turn around in policy for the Conservatives.

Not one Conservative MP has signed my motion this year calling for an extension.

Paul Holmes MP
House of Commons, London

Teen spirit



by Luke Jackson

That familiar chill is in the air. Much better for me; I hate the feel of the sun on my skin. Cold is so much more comforting. The icy-fingered tendrils on the windows and the thin film of frost over the garden brings one thing to mind for me...Christmas.

Everything seems to become slightly manic around this time of year. People run around searching for presents and general chit chat changes from "Isn't it cold today?" to "Are you ready for Christmas yet?"

This seems to be rather a strange thing to say, but for our family it is a valid question – after all, I think it is a little harder for Mum. She has seven children (and we have 6 siblings and one mum) and so we all get a little broke around Christmas.

Another difficulty is that Ben, being autistic and so rather particular, only likes computer games or anything that spins, and Joe, having AD/HD, can destroy the supposedly sturdiest of toys in a few minutes. Mat, my big dyspraxic brother, is impossible to buy for. He ends up getting endless pairs of socks which always come in handy as Joe insists on wearing multiple pairs at least 5 sizes too big! The girls are easier to buy for but still just as expensive. I just dream of...a new top of the range computer for my bedroom!

As for Mum, I was thinking of giving her own book, *Multicoloured Mayhem*, to her as a present and telling her to read her "survival guide".

Whilst she tells other people to relax, she doesn't do a lot of that herself. Being on the TV and in the newspapers a lot doesn't change the fact that she still has to change nappies, get up in the night and deal with the rest of us (not that I am any trouble!). In fact it doesn't change anything apart from make life rather busier, but Mum always says she will get her reward in heaven (whatever that means?!)

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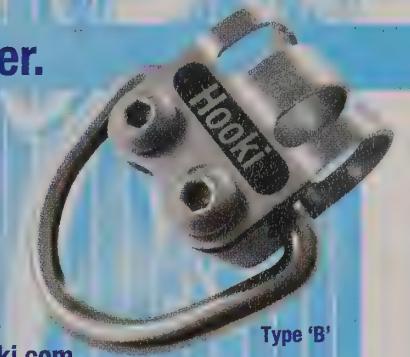


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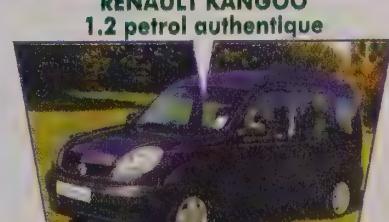
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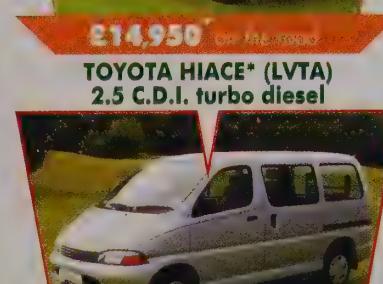
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All white on the night



She's one of Northern Ireland's best known psychics, whose stage shows are making her a star nationwide. A sceptical Lucy Glynn is won over by Sharon Neill

I hadn't asked Sharon for a reading but I was still apprehensive about meeting her. I needn't have worried.

She's friendly and down-to-earth, and is horrified at the thought that she might have inadvertently scared me.

She is also delighted with her new found success. "In the last few months, it has really started to take off. It's great. Everybody keeps saying to me, 'What's it like to be famous?' But I don't consider myself to be in that category."

Sharon has been blind from birth and grew up in Belfast, but a 1995 television documentary shown in the Republic of Ireland catapulted her into the limelight.

Now she is recognised regularly on buses and trains in Northern Ireland, and talks to anyone who approaches her.

Before finding fame, Sharon had been doing psychic readings as a hobby. Now she has read for thousands, including celebrities like Van

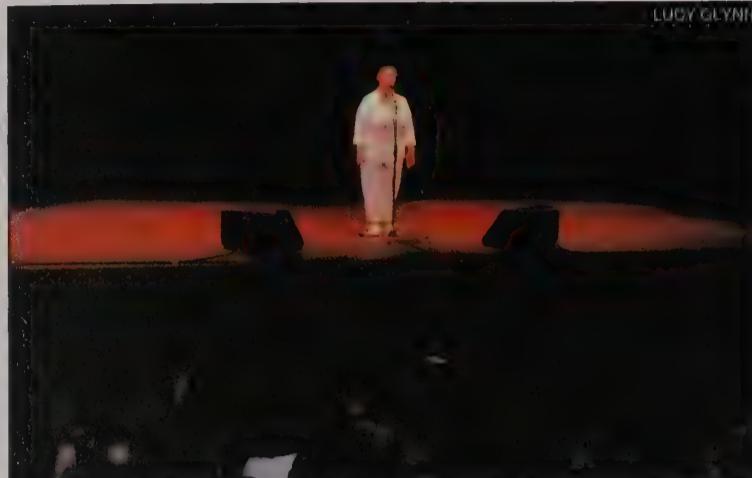
Morrison and members of the bands Coldplay and Ash. She has also helped the police with over 70 cases, including missing persons and murder investigations.

Following her sell-out show at this year's Edinburgh Festival, her career has also started to take off in the UK and she is currently on tour with her show, *Second Sight*.

She has been psychic for as long as she can remember, but says she didn't understand her talent when she was young.

"When I was five, I could hear people talking to me at night. It was really, really frightening. I knew they weren't in the room but I could never understand what they were saying. My family used to spend hours trying to calm me down."

When Sharon grew up, she started to understand what the voices were saying and was often accused of listening outside the school staff room. She just thought other people had given her the information.



That's me in the spotlight: (above) Sharon at The Broadway Theatre, Lewisham, and (below) relaxing in her dressing room

It wasn't until she was at college in England that her yoga teacher asked her how long she had been a medium.

"I said I wasn't a medium, I was a size ten! This was the furthest thing from my mind. I was totally academic. I come from a very working class background. We never knew about spiritual churches. I didn't even know there was such a thing."

It was shortly after this that she had her first "concrete experience", when she "saw" her grandmother, who had just died. She was able to describe what she had seen to her family.

"Up until then I didn't accept it. I thought, 'I'm cracking up here'."

After this, Sharon went to a spiritualist meeting. "I said, 'Could you please explain what I am meant to be possessing, because I don't know. I don't even believe in this'."

This initial resistance to her psychic ability ended when she realised she could use it to help people – she says she would have been a doctor, had she been sighted.

She was the first blind person in Northern Ireland to wear a Red Cross uniform, after threatening to take the charity to the European Court of Human Rights.

"I was only about 15 at the time. I had passed my exams like everyone else. There were some security things I couldn't do, but I could do bandages, splints and slings."

Sharon later worked as a Samaritans volunteer and wanted to become a social worker (she has psychology and sociology degrees), but says "it's all bureaucracy" and prefers what she's doing now.

Being blind has helped her work and many people come to her because of it. "It's a big advantage. I can't see who I am talking to in the audience. I have never seen colour but I can



describe their loved ones."

I am with Sharon before her show. On stage, it's just her. There are no earpieces, no tricks and no gimmicks. She starts by asking for a "Libby" or a "Lilly" and relays a message from a loved one.

Sometimes she gets things wrong or receives crossed messages, but she does seem to know personal information about people in the audience.

Although I am not one hundred per cent convinced, she appears to be picking up information from somewhere.

At the end of the show, some of the people who received messages are crying.

"It's more than a job to me," she says. "I believe in interacting with people; trying to help them understand."

Surprisingly for a psychic, perhaps, she adds: "I never know what's going to happen from one minute to the next."

One thing she does know about the future, though, is that she is likely to become very much busier.

Sharon Neill's UK tour runs until the end of February. www.sharonneill.com

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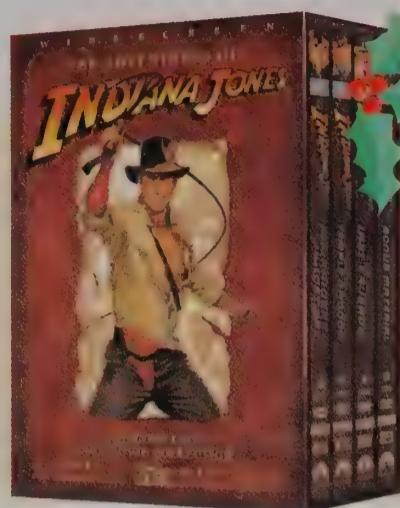


Motability

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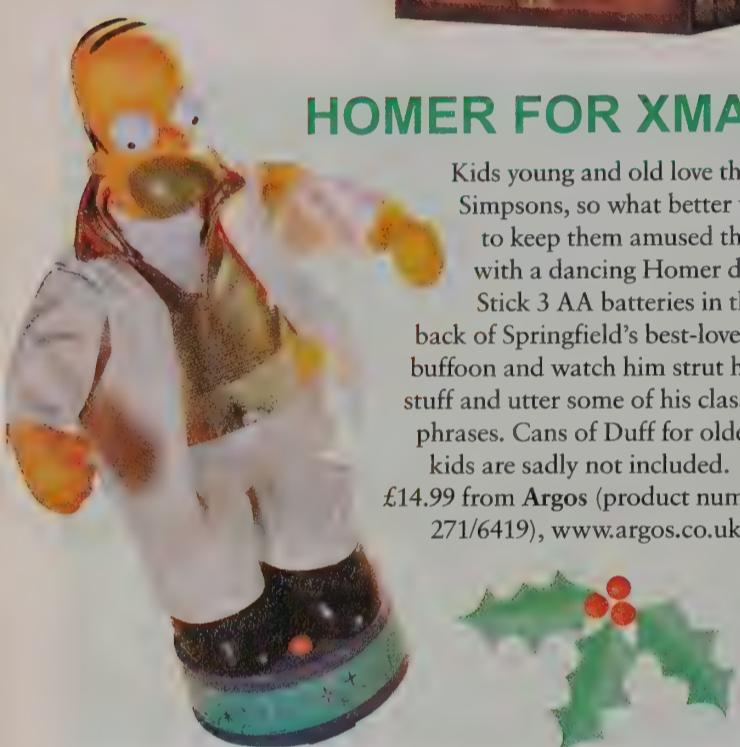


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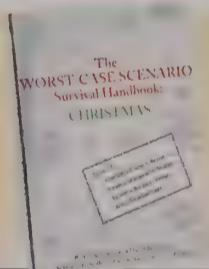
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There are a number of innovative gift ideas for wheelchair users this Christmas, including a range of products from GL100. This includes gloves specifically designed for greater ease and comfort, with padding, velcro tabs and stretch cuffs for flexibility and durability.

The winter Super Grip full-fingered gloves (£19.95) are made from leather and neoprene and are suitable for all outdoor weather conditions. The new easy-fit lightweight gloves (£10.95, left) allow for greater flexibility and are ideal if you have limited dexterity, as they are easier to put on and take off than conventional gloves.

The leather blue badge and parking timer display wallet (right) is designed to store your disability badge and time card so it can be easily displayed. You need never lose your badge again. £9.50.

Ideal for getting out and about, the multi-purpose daypack (below) has several zip pockets, a pouch for your mobile phone and adjustable straps. It can be worn on your front or stored under your wheelchair. £19.95.

Tel: 01633 216644. Available to order online at www.GL100.com



Christmas crackers

DN's motoring correspondent Douglas Campbell gives his top tips

How about a remote control car? Just the thing to avoid going out on a cold frosty morning! £9 from Tesco.

Also at Tesco, a pair of Binatone personal mobile radios. Handy for keeping in touch over shorter distances or just to summon someone to open the garage door when you arrive home! £29.99 per pair. www.tesco.com

A subscription to a motoring magazine might be a good choice. Gift packs are available at Tesco or try online at <http://cbshop.co.uk/disabilitynow>

Halfords are in many high streets and online. They have a rechargeable vacuum cleaner for the car at £19.99, a mains powered car polisher at £39.99, and car cleaning packs starting at £4.99. www.halfords.com

How about RAC membership (below) for that new driver?



Don't forget their special RAC Response service designed for all blue badge holders. Prices start at £39 (£5 off most online memberships). Buy from your local RAC sales point or online at <http://breakdowncover.co.uk/disabilitynow>

How about a mobile phone? An essential aid to safety when driving, especially if you are disabled. They are sold in many supermarkets and there are specialist shops in most towns. Staff at Carphone Warehouse are particularly helpful. DN's very own online shop offers a choice of four suppliers for mobile phones. You can buy lots of gadgets and gizmos for mobile phones, including stands that light up when the phone rings. Various prices. www.buy.co.uk/disabilitynow

At Superdrug you can buy a Porsche for just £2.66. It is a neat little air freshener for the

car. They also have a car cleaning kit at £8.66 and a radio control car at £6.66. www.superdrug.co.uk

Remember too that an up to date road atlas is always welcome. Do you know someone who has one that is years old and has pages falling out? Do think about the best size before buying. Large formats are fine on the kitchen table, but can be a nightmare when sitting in the car. Various prices from bookshops, petrol stations, supermarkets or Halfords. Alternatively, try online at Amazon <http://www.supplier.co.uk/disabilitynow>



Looking for an easy way to refuel your vehicle? Try the hands free fuel filler from Easifuel (above). It holds the fuel nozzle to make refuelling easier, cleaner and more convenient. It also has an ice scraper for those frosty winter mornings. £2.99. Tel: 020 7582 1117.

More presents on pages 22 and 23



LIFE'S A BALL

If you fancy a bit of gentle exercise to work off those post-Christmas pounds, then a Pilates ball and accompanying exercise video could be just the thing. The ball comes with removable tubing if you want to increase tension and make your work out harder.

And the 20 minute video workout should see you on the road to a new trimmer you. £29.99. www.alt-gifts.com



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Stocking fillers

Chickend Shed theatre company have released a CD featuring a host of pop, soul, jazz and classical stars, plus a few wild-card surprises, including Emma Bunton and the original bachelor boy, Sir Cliff Richard. The album, on Redemption Records, includes songs written and performed by the company. They're also selling a new cookbook, entitled *Recipes from the Shed*, featuring dishes from the stars. Tel: 020 8351 6161



If you know someone who finds it especially cold during the winter months, get them a hand muff from Muffle-Up. They come in a range of sizes and colours, including distinctive animal prints. Sports fans can even choose a muff in their team colours. And for the kids, there are the aptly named Kiddimuffs. From £12.50, tel: 01253 822392, www.muffle-up.com



A year in print

Lucy Howard picks some recommended reads from DN's book columns in 2003 and rounds up a few Christmas must-haves

Older readers

Highlights from this year include Christopher Reeve's *Nothing is Impossible*, chronicling his research into spinal cord injuries. *Century*, £6.99

Heather Mills McCartney's autobiography *A Single Step* charts her journey from poverty to high-profile campaigner. *Warner*, £14.96

Wintering by Kate Moses is a fictional novel detailing the last few months of Sylvia Plath's life. Watch out for the film *Sylvia*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow, to be released in January. *Sceptre*, £14.99

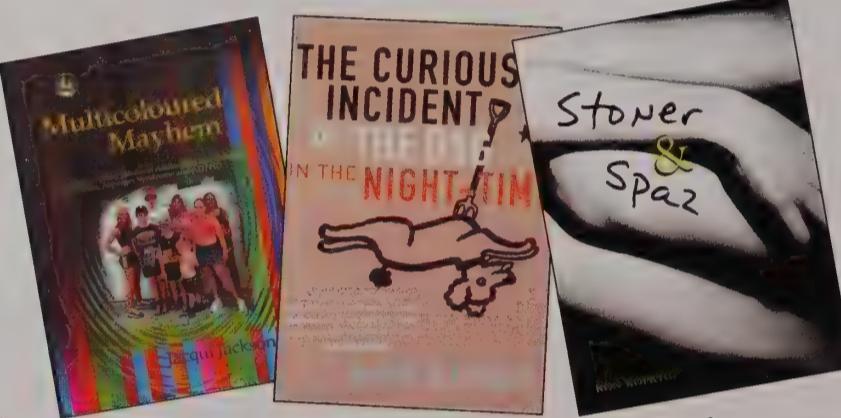
Multicoloured Mayhem by Jacqui Jackson (right) is an account of being a parent to seven children, including Luke, who has Asperger's Syndrome, Ben, who has autism and Joe, who has ADHD. The book offers advice for other parents and carers. *Jessica Kingsley*, £12.95 (Luke writes on page 16)

Keeping Mum by Gwyneth Lewis is a book of poems taking a journey through the world of mental illness, exploring life, death and religion through different languages and landscapes. *Bloodaxe*, £7.95

For the kids

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time, a mystery tale by Mark Haddon (below), won the Guardian children's fiction prize this year and has also just been shortlisted for a Whitbread award. It tells the story of 15-year-old Christopher Boone, who has Asperger's Syndrome. *Jonathan Cape*, £10.99

For disaffected teenagers everywhere, there's *Stoner and Spaz* by Ron Koertge (below right). 16-year-old Ben Bancroft, who has cerebral palsy and is nicknamed "Spaz", leads a



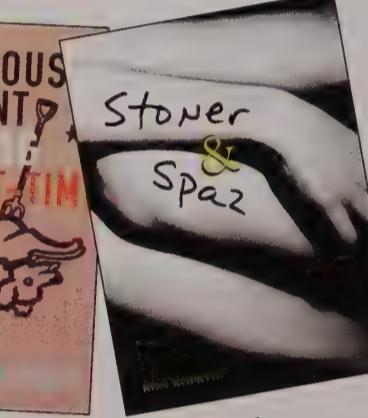
lonely, invisible life until he meets Colleen, or "Stoner", a teenager with a drug habit. The book charts their relationship as they each battle with their own demons. *Walker*, £4.99

The *Letterland* series of

books and videos for pre-school children offer a fun and educational aid to letter recognition, ideal for children with learning difficulties. Each letter has an alliterative character, like Annie Apple, who goes on an adventure. The latest in the series is *A Christmas Story*. From £5.99. www.amazon.co.uk

Audio books

Following Right to Read week in October, the RNIB has begun recording all 100 books from the BBC's Big Read series, including favourites



from Jane

Austen to Roald Dahl. RNIB has also released audio versions of the books on the Booker prize shortlist.

Tel: 0845 766 9999
www.rnib.org.uk

Stephen Fry narrates *The*



Bookworm: Clive Anderson with the top-100 Big Reads

Order of the Phoenix, the latest in the Harry Potter series. In the fifth and most complex book, Harry reaches his rebellious teenage phase. Unabridged. From £52.50. www.amazon.co.uk, www.bbc.co.uk.

Lord of the Rings: The Collectors Edition is a must for Tolkien fans. The three tales are presented in a ring-shaped tin, each one with a circular booklet detailing the cast, track listing and notes. There is also a bonus disk about the making of the radio series. Narrated by Ian Holm, Michael Hordern and John Le Mesurier. From £80, www.amazon.co.uk, www.bbc.co.uk

BUY A DN CARD!

DN is proud to reveal its annual Christmas card. Designed by production editor Jamie Trounce, it is now available for DN readers to buy.



A pack of five cards (including envelopes) is a gift at £1.50.

International Day of Disabled People 2003

A message from the Mayor of London

On International Day of Disabled People 2003 I would like to send my best wishes to disabled Londoners and organisations of disabled people in London. I would like to thank all those who are working to achieve disability equality, many of whom are volunteers. I also want to acknowledge the huge contribution disabled people make to all aspects of life in London. As the European Year of Disabled People closes, I want to ensure that disability equality remains a priority for the future. On December 13th at the Excel Centre in Docklands I will hold the Disability Capital Conference, which will give

disabled Londoners an opportunity to question London's decision makers and to discuss ways of making London a more accessible and inclusive city. The conference will also showcase the initial findings from the Disability Capital consultation. This ground-breaking consultation will identify what policies should be put into place to provide 21st century services for disabled Londoners. The consultation ends on 31 January 2004 and I encourage all disabled Londoners to have their say.

Ken Livingstone

Mayor of London

European Year of
DISABLED
People in LONDON

MAYOR OF LONDON

Contact details for questionnaire and Conference:
020 7983 4100 minicom 020 7983 4458
disabilitycapital@london.gov.uk
www.london.gov.uk/surveys/disability_capital

To get hold of yours, ring us on 020 7619 7323 or email us at: lucy.howard@scope.org.uk

A feast of food ideas

Over the year, we've featured exclusive recipes from a line up of top disabled chefs. For our Christmas edition, two of them have compiled a mouthwatering *DN* seasonal menu



Billy Gallagher's pork fillet with mustard sauce and glazed pineapple

- 1 pork fillet, 350 gr trimmed of all fat and sinew
- Two tinned pineapple rings
- Teaspoon dry hot English mustard
- 1 onion
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 teaspoon mixed herbs
- Salt and pepper
- 150 gr mushrooms
- 50 gr butter
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 cup cream

Method

Cut the pork fillet into four steaklets and flatten slightly. Roll the steaklets in the mustard seasoned with salt and pepper, together with the mixed herbs.

Fry the pork in the butter until almost cooked. Do not overcook. Take the pork out of the frying pan and set aside.

Slice the onion and mushrooms together with the chopped garlic, add to the pan and cook off.

Then add the cream and allow to cook down slightly for a further four minutes. Add the steaklets back to the cream sauce and keep warm.

Pour the honey over the pineapple rings and place the rings under the grill until golden brown.

Place the steaklets on a warm plate with the pineapple rings on the sides. Then serve immediately with a mixed salad and sautéed potatoes. *In August, Billy was the convenor for the second World Cooks Tour for Hunger.*

Tesco's finest Vintage Christmas Pudding, £7.99

Michael Caines' Christmas pudding

- 450gr raisins
- 450gr currants
- 450gr sultanas
- 225gr flour
- 225gr white breadcrumbs
- 60gr mixed peel
- 225gr brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 450gr beef suet
- 3 eggs
- 30gr chopped nuts (optional)
- 6gr salt
- 40ml sherry
- 40ml brandy
- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- Milk to bind
- 1 juice of a lemon
- Grated nutmeg

Method

Prepare all the ingredients, and mix together all the dry ones. Stir in the beaten eggs and sherry, brandy and lemon juice.

Add enough milk to make the mixture the right consistency – that is, fairly stiff.

Put it into a greased basin, put a piece of greaseproof paper on the top, and then cover with greaseproof paper and secure with an elastic band.

Steam for eight hours and then leave to cool and store. Then resteam the pudding for another hour on day of eating.

Serve with Cognac Anglaise and clotted cream.

• *Michael Caines restaurants: Royal Clarence Hotel, Exeter, tel: 01392 310031, Michael Caines at The Bristol Marriott Royal Hotel, Bristol, tel: 0117 910 5330, Gidleigh Park, Chagford, tel: 01647 432367*



Michael Caines' Christmas cake

- 250gr flour, soft
- 250gr unsalted butter
- 250gr dark sugar
- 250gr currants
- 250gr sultanas
- 175gr cherries
- Dash of brandy
- Dash of rum
- 1/2 teaspoonful baking powder
- 175gr orange peel, chopped fine
- 175gr lemon peel, chopped fine
- 30gr ground almonds
- 1/2 teaspoon mixed spice
- 4 eggs

Method

Cream together the butter and the sugar. Add the eggs one at the time, beating well.

Add a little flour with the last one or two eggs if the mixture shows any signs of curdling.

Put the other dry ingredients together, and add them to the mixture.

Put the rum and brandy in half-way through.

Stir the mixture well so that all the ingredients are well blended.

Put the mixture into a well greased double-lined tin and bake at 160 degrees centigrade until thoroughly cooked (about three hours).

Icing: Put a layer of almond paste around it, then cover with royal icing and leave to set. Decorate as you see fit.

Note: This cake should be made at least three weeks before Christmas, as it improves with keeping.

Stocking fillers

Pressies for the chocoholic include Lindt's indulgent Modern Miniatures – that's 50 mini chocolates in five fillings – and the Christmas Cornet, containing soft milk truffles, £7.99 and £5.49 respectively, www.lindt.com. For the fair-trading chocoholic, try Oxfam's super Belgian chocolates in a gold box (£5.99, right) and the Red and Gold Satin Stocking filled with chocolate balls, £3.99 from Oxfam shops. Just beware that you don't get tempted when wrapping them up.

If you're after a more lasting gift, then how about a plant?

Fill a container or hanging basket with winter flowering pansies or dwarf

Tête à Tête

daffodils. Both Homebase and B&Q have a good selection of heathers and trailing ivies for the green-fingered friend, and to add a little Christmas colour, there's a more festive red poinsettia available (pictured, from £1.98).

Marks and Spencer offer a number of gifts for the beer lover. The Beers of the World gift set (£10) allows you to sample five different beers from around the globe without leaving your armchair.

Or how about a bottle of festive ale and a quality glass tankard, perfect for drinking it in (above, £8).

From stores nationwide. www.marksandspencer.com



Twelve top tipplings

• **Marks & Spencer** are offering two bottles of the White Bourras Chardonnay or the red Cabinet Savvignon for £8. Their champagne starts at £9.99. www.marksandspencer.com

• **Asda**'s top buys include the cheap, but not nasty, South African Cape Medium White, a steal at £2.77. The rather nice Bourras Shiraz red comes in at £6.97. Asda's Brut champagne retails at £10.96. www.asda.co.uk

• **Tesco**'s seasonal range includes the Vintage Claret at £4.99 and the Tim Adams Shiraz from Australia (£8.99). The Tesco Finest Champagne Premier Cru is £12.99 (right). www.tesco.co.uk/christmas

• **Sainsbury's** have a good low-range selection. Worth a try is the white Muscadet Sevre et Maine (£4.99) and the Classic Selection Claret (£5.99). Their extra dry champagne is £14.49. www.sainsburys.co.uk



• **Eisberg** is the UK's number one alcohol-free wine which is stocked in many off-licenses and supermarkets. Their Rose and Chardonnay (£2.99) are both great.

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www.londonrecumbents.co.uk

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A deaf person's testimonial for Sky

bringing deaf people in to the picture

How Sky are bringing images alive with words and signs for their deaf viewers

a personal perspective as signed by Aimee Cockle

Aimee is profoundly deaf from birth and is very active within the deaf community being part of an energetic Deaf Youth movement striving for better access and greater deaf awareness.

"I remember the frustrations of going out with my hearing friends and having to sit through films at the local cinema not being able to understand the dialogue and follow the plot because there were no subtitles.

"Watching films on mainstream telly was a bore as they were usually old or repeated – I wanted to watch recently released blockbuster films!"

"Then in recent years there were subtitled videos I could rent but finding new releases with subtitles was often pot luck.

"And then I discovered Sky – fantastic experience, I was able to flick through loads of channels even foreign ones and see what was on offer.

"For me watching the Box Office movies are brilliant as they are very recently released films and all are subtitled and easy to follow – the problem is usually which movie to watch!"

"The Sports Channels are also good and lots of sporting events have live subtitling which enables me to know what is being said by commentators and panellists – no more second guessing what is being said.



Aimee Cockle

"Okay it costs £38.00 per month to get the Sky World package but what you get is quality and accessible programmes that really allows me to have another outlet to chill out – I even invite my deaf friends around to have an evening in watching Sky movies works out a lot cheaper than going to the cinema.

"I have not used it yet, but it is really good to know that there is this Disability Service Team that has been set up at Sky and I have noticed that they have their own text phone service – that is brilliant for me as I now have peace of mind in that if I have any problems or queries then I can get on to my text phone and deal directly with someone at Sky who is deaf aware and can talk to me by text."

Kay Allen – Disability for Sky added

"Sky are determined to ensure that great TV is not exclusive TV for their deaf viewers, and by continuing to research and put in to place improved technology and enhanced access, things can only get better."

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- **Disability website** - offering accessible information and a dedicated e-mail address for people who prefer to communicate electronically.
for further information
text: **08702 40 19 10** or
For information or to join up
call: **08705 66 33 33** or
email: **disability@sky.com** or
Visit your Sky website -
www.sky.com/disability



Cold comfort at Christmas

Thousands of disabled people will spend Christmas on the streets. Nuala Calvi meets four of them

This Christmas, 93,480 households will be homeless.

While there are no definitive statistics on the numbers of disabled people among them, the link between ill health and homelessness is clear.

After lack of accommodation, it is the most frequent problem mentioned by people calling the charity Shelter.

Living on the streets or in

poor accommodation can aggravate and also cause respiratory and joint problems, while lack of washing facilities can result in infections and deep vein thrombosis among drug users.

And although it is difficult to establish whether homelessness tends to be the cause or the outcome of mental illness, mental health problems are up to four times more



common in homeless people.

Housing authorities have a duty to provide housing for people with mental or physical illnesses or disabilities, but according to Shelter, many have problems registering with a GP, who needs to provide proof

that they are "vulnerable".

The charity says housing and support services – such as social services – are in some cases failing to work together, allowing people with complex needs, like those who have been discharged from hospital or

psychiatric units, to be offered unsuitable accommodation or to fall through the net completely.

Here, four homeless disabled people tell us how they found themselves homeless and about the added pressures that being disabled on the streets can bring.

Ram Chand, 48, Thamesreach Bondway Hostel



I was renting a room after my marriage broke up and when the tenancy finished I couldn't find another place that would take someone on DSS (benefits).

I spent nearly three years living through snow, rain and cold in one set of clothes. Having a mobility impairment made that harder. I have a metal

plate in my leg and used to be able to walk with crutches, but when I became homeless I started to drink more and got peripheral neuropathy, which affects your movement.

Being unable to stand made me vulnerable. I got beaten and mugged and by the time I stood up they would

have taken my money and gone. I still got benefits, using my wife's address, but on the street you are an easy target. They attack you when you leave the post office, but there's nothing you can do.

There are two wheelchairs here at the hostel, but I don't use them – I don't have anywhere to go.

Bernard Murphy, 47, Thamesreach Bondway Hostel

My mental illness takes the form of psychoses or delusions. It suddenly came upon me in 2002. I was living in a council flat in Tower Hamlets and I believed things would happen to me if I stayed there, so I walked out.

I lived rough and ate whatever I could find. I was afraid to go to day centres and isolated myself. There were two other homeless people in that locality but I didn't want to discuss my mental health problem with them.

I didn't consider whether I needed medical help. As far as I was concerned, I was the same person.

When the outreach team came and picked me up, I was unsure of them, but they were very encouraging. I've been here since June last year and I have my own room. I now have a psychiatrist and am on medication. To a great extent the voices have stopped.

Arrangements are being made with my keyworker for resettlement in a shared house. *Bernard is pictured above*

Jane Burns, 37, Big Issue vendor, with husband Karl, 32



I got into drugs and became homeless after losing my limbs on my right side in a motorbike accident in 1999. Social services took the children out, and our whole world fell to pieces.

Many of the homeless centres see that you're a double amputee and immediately say they can't let you in for

health and safety reasons.

Everybody thinks if you're disabled you get a house straight away, but it can take longer because of the lack of ground floor places. We've been on the verge of getting a flat for two years, but it's taken that long to get them to make it accessible. Every time I got out of detox, they

thought we'd get back on drugs so they put me in a B&B instead, which put me back into the situation that got me on drugs.

We're waiting to move in now, but there's no grants for furniture, so I've been selling the Big Issue and saving cash.

We're doing well; we've been clean for a month.

Mike Johnson, 41, Big Issue vendor



I've had 50 per cent hearing since birth. I used to work as a chef but I had problems around alcohol which spiralled out of control.

I've been homeless for seven years, staying on friends' floors, or in hostels, which are a nightmare. I keep as much to myself as I can in hostels because they are scary places.

The hearing aids show people you're vulnerable, and they think they can intimidate you. I've been kicked off my Big Issue pitch more than once.

Physically, I don't know if I'm able to work again regularly. I had a back operation and I can't stand up for too long selling the paper. It affects

how many I sell. I sell about 15-20 a day, a couple of days a week. Sometimes I can't do it at all because I'm too unwell.

I'm on a college course and my social worker is looking into finding me a place shortly, so hopefully I will get out soon. I have family around London who I might see at Christmas.

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For your chance to win tickets to *Beauty and the Beast*, see page 39.

RSC
ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

Festival

London Film Festival

This year's London Film Festival featured a number of interesting movies with disability content.

Isabel Coixet's *My Life Without Me* is a film about a young woman who has never had control over her life, but takes control over her death.

Diagnosed with terminal cancer, Ann (Sarah Polley) keeps the news from her family, but draws up a list of things to do before she dies.

Prepared to dislike it, I was won over by an engrossing and surprisingly optimistic little movie with a thoughtful script.

In Benoit Mariage's *The Missing Half*, Pierre, an optician, and his wife, Claire, decide to abort one of the twins she is carrying. He then makes



friends with Laurent, a young (possibly learning disabled) blind man. Pierre leaves Claire, Claire starts to volunteer at the institution in which Laurent lives, and finds that learning disabled people have much to teach her. Then Pierre comes back. I found it a confused film, perhaps because the director expects his audience to understand far more than he puts on screen.

In Andrea Gibb's *Afterlife*,

Kenny Brogan (Kevin McKidd) is an ambitious journalist working on a story about assisted euthanasia when he is summoned home to help look after his sister, Roberta, who has Down's syndrome. Roberta is played by Paula Sage, who has Down's herself. Paula is a major find – definitely worth looking out for in the future.

Takeshi Kitano's *Zatoichi* (above), a remake of the Japanese series about a

wandering blind swordsman, is like a samurai equivalent of a spaghetti western: gory but immensely stylish. Zatoichi is a tremendous hero, the fighter who's so cool he doesn't even need to see his opponents. It's bloody, unrealistic as a portrayal of disability and I loved every minute of it.

The big discovery for me was Tom McCarthy's *The Station Agent*. Finbar McBride (Peter Dinklage) is a young man with dwarfism, a railway fan, who inherits an old train depot in rural New Jersey. Moving there, he finds his solitude disturbed by bouncy hot-dog man Joe (Bobby Cannavale) and artist Olivia (Patricia Clarkson), who moved to the country after her child died. It's a gentle film about the growth of friendship but also a thoroughly believable story about a disabled person living in the real world.

Allan Sutherland

Film



Wilbur (wants to kill himself)



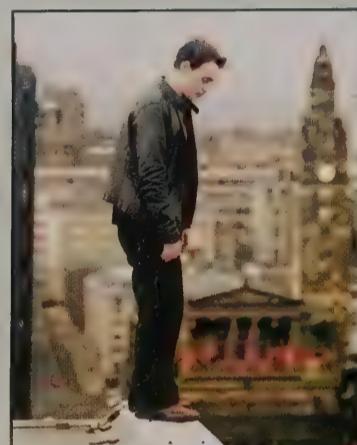
In Lone Scherfig's film, brothers Wilbur (Jamie Sives) and Harbour (Adrian Rawlins) live in Glasgow, where Harbour runs a second-hand bookshop.

Wilbur wants to kill himself but hasn't yet succeeded. Harbour finds love and potential happiness with single parent Alice. But ironically, he is

the one who is to be deprived of life, when he finds he has cancer of the pancreas.

This is a Danish film set in Scotland, which does lead to some peculiarities, such as the scene where *Auld Lang Syne* is played at Christmas.

It's a lazy film. If Scherfig had done proper research into how people kill themselves in the UK, she would have discovered that no-one commits suicide by sticking their head in the gas oven, because North Sea gas isn't poisonous. And to have the attempt fail because



the gas runs out is about the oldest failed-suicide gag in the book.

Furthermore, I didn't believe in Wilbur's basic suicidal impulse, partly because it has been my experience that people who genuinely want to kill themselves tend to find ways of doing so, but largely because it doesn't work to convince us.

The film is manipulative, with heavy use of music, but doesn't get anywhere. It's not good about cancer and completely uninformative about suicidal feelings. It looks lovely, but just doesn't convince.

Allan Sutherland

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EXCUSES!

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'comedy of the year'

El Pais

Sign Language interpreted: 17 December, 7.30pm by Sam Mailes

Audio Described: 18 December, 7.30pm by LADs

Last Christmas, Tall Stories presented THE GRUFFALO, this year they return with

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Evening News ★★★★

Sign Language interpreted: 18 December, 2pm by Andy Long

Audio Described performance: 17 December, 2pm by LADs

Edinburgh 2003, First of the Firsts Winner 2003

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Time Out

Sign Language interpreted: 4 February, 7.30pm by Russ Aldersson

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www.sohotheatre.com minicom 020 7478 0136

Soho Theatre is fully wheelchair accessible. Notify box office of your requirements when booking.



Coming up

The Xposure festival concludes at the end of November, so it's your last chance to catch the range of shows on offer, including *When Snow Falls* (right). The play follows the imagination of five-year-old T, who dreams of a world covered in snow. For family audiences of ages 4+. Integrated sign language interpretation.

29 November, Jackson's Lane Theatre, tel: 020 8340 5226

The Chicken Shed theatre company is celebrating its 30th anniversary with a production of *A Night Before Christmas*, a musical extravaganza set on Christmas Eve.

2 December, Chicken Shed Theatre, tel: 020 8351 6161

It's party season, and the year's festivals are ending with a bang. Xposure has a free party at Oval House Theatre.



28 November, www.xposurefestival.com Liverpool's Dadafest is hosting an awards ceremony and dinner, £25 each to include meal, wine, entertainment and a disco.

3 December, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Pier Head, NWDAF, tel: 0151 707 1733, email: information@nudaf.co.uk There's also a finale to the European Year of Disabled People, with a range of activities including exhibitions, speakers, workshops, films and entertainment.

2 December, York House, Twickenham, tel: 020 8891 7229, www.richmond.gov.uk

Lucy Howard

TV

B BC2's accessible business show *Working Lunch* covered disability issues recently (talking books, technology and benefits) in a week long strand. Spinally injured Kevin Bloxham works from home but the commentary indicated he wasn't entitled to any benefits because he was working. What about Disability Living Allowance, I wonder?

Benefits wouldn't fund the vehicles driven by racing driver Alex Zanardi, who lost both legs following a high speed crash (*BBC Sport*). He drives a hand-controlled vehicle, and, as the reporter pointed out, if he breaks a leg now it can be fixed with a 4mm screw.

I'm not really into sitcoms, but caught the first episode of the second series of BBC1's *All About Me*, where powerchair-using Raj's mum has transmogrified from Meera Syal into Nina Wadia without anyone noticing. I don't find it funny, but at least Raj's voiceover commentary (by Luke Allder) is to be supplemented by a communicating device – not before time.

C4's *Operatunity* winners, Denise Leigh (who is blind) and Janet Gilchrist, appeared on *GMTV: LK Live* to promote their eponymous CD – a great stocking filler.

We've all heard of the *Horse of the Year Show*, but have you heard of the Dog of the Year, as featured on BBC1's *The Day Team* at Chatsworth? Endall is an assistance dog who undertakes supermarket shopping and uses cash machines amongst other talents. But don't worry; he doesn't have the PIN number.

C4's *Namibia Challenge* needed a strong commentary to link the somewhat disjointed scenes of four wheelchair users and seven disadvantaged (but not disabled) young people on an African adventure.

Whilst the disabled participants took abseiling and kayaking in their stride, their non-disabled counterparts were stroppy and unhelpful by turns. After a few days, two girls were sent home because of "disruptive" behaviour – which we hadn't really seen, unless reading a magazine is disruptive.

A wasted opportunity
Jane Shepherd



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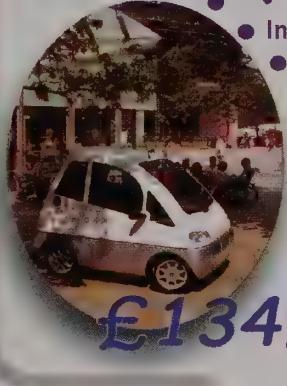
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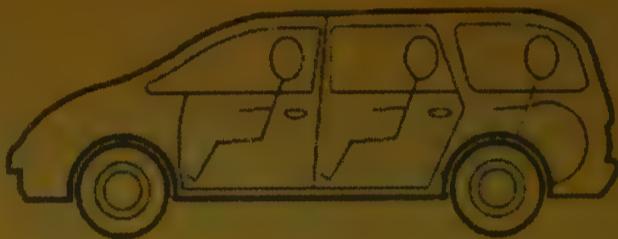
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A star is born

Santa doesn't traditionally use a wheelchair. But dad Andy Healey's not your traditional Santa

My big break came in 1994. I was invited to play Santa Claus at the Christmas party for the children at our local infants school, which our eldest (Ryan, now 15) attended.

The idea was that I would dispense gifts and good cheer from my very own grotto, which came as something of a relief – Santa wheeling round the classrooms would have been a bit of a giveaway.

You could imagine the kids asking: "Mummy, how does he get up to the chimney, never mind down it?" And all that fur trim would just get chewed up in the spokes and castors.

I have always been aware that the chair rather cramps my style as a harbinger of festive greetings.

Apart from the hugging dilemma – around the hips or wait for the huggee to bend down? – our kids would have twigged straightaway if they were to witness me on Christmas Eve, wheeling over the junk in their bedrooms, cars and stormtroopers scattered in my wake, en route to the foot of their bunk beds.

At the time of my beckoning Santa stardom, Ryan was five and his brother Adam was just a toddler. Sister Caitlin was now but a twinkle.

Anyway, I jumped at this opportunity to get on the giving, rather than receiving, end of the holiday spirit.

I must at this stage pay tribute to my lovely wife Linda, who put me forward at the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting and to whom I owe all my success. There was even a proper grotto: caretaker Peter had rigged it up from MDF and bits of old fir tree in one of the classrooms while the kids were falling upon their Christmas tea in the hall.

Inside my grotto, I donned the Santa outfit. Pulling on the baggy red trousers involved a fair bit of violent writhing on the floor, and, more than once, my over-exertions threatened to bring the whole edifice crashing down. But a beard, belt, hat and some cushion padding later and I was heaving myself onto my seat in the corner of my seasonal wonderland, combing my beard into shape and arranging my knees in a crowd pleasing manner. A bemused teacher's assistant

handed over my sack.

In an effort to put my heart and soul into the role, and so add magic to the experience, I had been trying to come up with some dialogue beyond the traditional "ho, ho, ho".

I wanted to know what their favourite present had been the year before, or even, this being a Church of England-assisted school, whether they considered the concept of Father Christmas to be entirely consistent with the teachings of the Bible. It's all part of method-acting, as I remember telling Bobby de Niro once.

Of course it turned out to be a complete waste of energy. It was particularly wasted on the reception class who were universally struck dumb by the enormity of the occasion.

Their more eloquent Year 1

'I asked them if they wanted anything special for Christmas and then gave them something entirely unconnected and cheap from my sack'

colleagues just wanted to bathe in the warm glow of the standard patter, and some of the worldly-wise Year 2s were clearly suspicious of the whole set-up. I believe they would have

grassed me up in a second had it not been for the fact that a gift was on offer.

Luckily, young Healey R was a Year 1-er, and I reckoned I had the measure of him. Deep brown voice – that's the key.

We lived then in more innocent times, and my decision not to invite each child onto my knee was based purely on the practical fear that his or her weight could well whip my knee out in one direction or another, thus catapulting the poor little tot into the activity chest or work-boxes, depending on trajectory.

This, I thought, might get me into trouble and I had nothing extra with which to bribe them. I wouldn't even be able to help them up and staunch the bleeding. No elves, you see.

When their time came, I



Christmas cracker: Andy hopes for better presents than he gives

from my sack.

I cannot remember what the toys were but, even with a thriving PTA such as we had, buying for 60 had put limits on what was available. There would have been a boy's toy, a girl's toy and a kind-of unisex effort with which to cover myself.

Oh, but darlings, they loved me. I held my belly and laughed kindly, patting the little poppets on the head as my

sack slowly emptied.

Only one little boy thought to question my existence to my face, so I laughed some more, and Ryan didn't twig.

The word did get around the school later but, by then, my contribution had passed into theatrical legend.

You won't be surprised to learn that, as a direct result, I am regularly commissioned to read out the questions at the PTA's annual quiz night.

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ILLUSTRATION BY CLARE CURTIS

Dear Ann

- love and loneliness
- bereavement
- personal problems
- advice and support

Ann Darnbrough, who is disabled herself, is co-author of the *Directory for Disabled People* and other guides. Write to her at *Disability Now*, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW or email your problem to editor@disabilitynow.org.uk



Life is slipping me by

I'm really bored with my life. I'm disabled but can get around fairly well. I would like to work but just can't find the right job.

I'm not prepared to do any old job which will make me just as bored.

I'm interested in animals but it's too late to train as a vet. I don't know where to turn and my life seems to be slipping by.

Patrick, Hampshire
Boredom is not such a bad thing, so long as it pushes you into pursuing goals.

Just use it to spark your imagination and develop opportunities, which, if you start looking, you will see all around you.

There are endless opportunities for volunteering in whatever subjects interest you. A visit to your local library will reveal all kinds of subjects that might intrigue you.

You say you are interested in animals. You might try contacting The Blue Cross. They look

after and seek to rehome animals in need of care. They run hospitals and adoption centres around the country which welcome volunteers.

They produce a magazine and three books: *Careers with horses*, *Careers with the Blue Cross* and *Careers in veterinary nursing*.

In no time at all you will wonder how you could ever have been bored. You will also have the chance to make friends with other volunteers as well as with the animals.

• *The Blue Cross*,
Shilton Road, Burford,
Oxfordshire, OX18 4PF
tel: 01993 822651
www.bluecross.org.uk

Can't afford equipment

I am 28 and have been severely disabled with Friedrich's Ataxia since I was seven.

I recently went to the Independent Living Exhibition where I saw products that would make daily living much easier. The problem is money. I

rely solely on state benefits and so can't afford the prices for such equipment.

Can you advise me on how and where to seek funding?

Amelia, London

It can be very frustrating going to these exhibitions when you see so many products which could be so useful to you – but which are, of course, always so expensive.

You could begin by asking your social services department whether they could provide the aids you need.

Regarding grants, the *Directory of Social Change* has a publication entitled *A guide to grants for individuals in need*. You should be able to see this in your local library, but it may also be worth getting your own copy so that you can study it to find the most suitable grant-making trusts for your particular needs.

• *Directory of Social Change*,
24 Stephenson Way,
London, NW1 2DP,
tel: 020 7209 5151

No easy ride with scooter

I am disabled with heart and lung problems as well as spinal trouble and acute asthma. To get me out and about, I decided to buy a mobility scooter. I had nothing but trouble with it. To cap it all, the company which sold me the scooter went bankrupt, but I still had to pay the £130 a month until I had paid the £4,000 I owed. Now I have a second scooter and I am having similar problems all over again. I am also having all sorts of difficulties with the insurance. What can I do?

Susan, Tamworth

I am sorry to hear of all the problems you have had with two scooters. As a consumer you have rights, not least that what you buy should be "fit for purpose". I suggest you contact your local Trading Standards Department. They are in the phone book, or you can find your local branch on their website.

So far as your insurance is concerned, I have been in touch with Fish Insurance Services who only undertake insurance for disabled people. I am sure they would do their best to help you. They have a freephone number and a website which will give you all the information you need.

- *Fish Insurance Services*, 3-4 Riversway Business Village, Navigation Way, Preston PR2 2YP, tel: freephone 0500 4321 41, www.fishinsurance.co.uk
- www.tradingstandards.gov.uk

Working flat out

My daughter Natasha has CP and uses a stick to aid her mobility.

She works freelance at the BBC and is determined to get similar work when she moves to London.

She has stayed with friends before but would like to find a flat this time to give her more independence. Who should she contact for advice on potential properties?

Jessie, Leicester
As you will know, suitable accommodation in London is extremely difficult to find and to afford.

As Natasha has worked freelance for the BBC, I suggest she contacts colleagues

working in London to ask their advice.

They may be able to put an advert for her on an internal notice board, in the staff magazine or on their intranet, describing what accommodation she needs.

She could also contact the housing officer of a local authority for advice or place an advert in a local newspaper.

The Centre for Accessible Environments may also be able to advise. Although they do not provide accommodation, they may be able to suggest who to contact.

But she might be better off sharing a flat with someone else. Many young people find this a cheaper and more sociable option. Placing an advert in *Loot*, or on its website, in *Time Out*, or in a local paper could find suitable people to share with.

- *Centre for Accessible Environments*, Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street, London SE1 2NY, tel: 020 7357 8182
- <http://property.loot.com>

Help at the end of the phone



DN's telephone counsellor Lin Berwick gives disabled people and carers advice and support on personal and spiritual problems. Disabled herself, Lin is a psycho-therapeutic counsellor and Methodist local preacher, with a postgraduate diploma in homeopathic medicine. If you have something you need to discuss in confidence, talk to her on Mondays 6pm-10pm and Thursdays 1pm-5pm, tel: 01787 882111.

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This roomy and most comfortable five seater can be reverted back into a seven seater if wheelchair passenger or scooter space is not required.



Drive-in wheelchair access

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Hire a Renault Kangoo from £45 per day. See below.

Renault Kangoo RN 1.4 Manual

2 front seats, folding ramp giving 54" access height and 57" inside headroom. 2 seater with 50" x 32" wheelchair seated passenger or unoccupied scooter station. £45 per day or £225 per week

Renault Kangoo RXE 1.6 Auto

2 front seats and 60/40 split folding rear seats, folding ramp giving 54" access height and 57" inside headroom. 3 seater with 50" x 32" wheelchair seated passenger or unoccupied scooter station or 5 seater without wheelchair passenger or scooter. Hand controls at no extra cost. £50 per day or £250 per week

Hire a Chrysler Voyager from £70 per day. See below.



Chrysler Voyager 2.4 SE Manual

Luxurious 4 or 5 seater with air-conditioning, double folding 'easy' ramp giving 51" access height and 55" headroom - 44" by 30" wheelchair seated passenger or unoccupied scooter station. £70 per day or £350 per week

Chrysler Grand Voyager 3.3 Ltd Auto

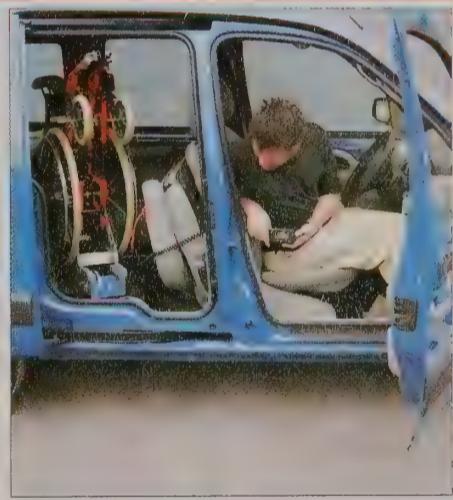
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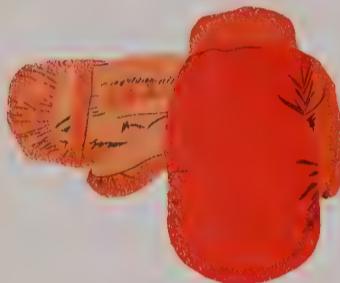
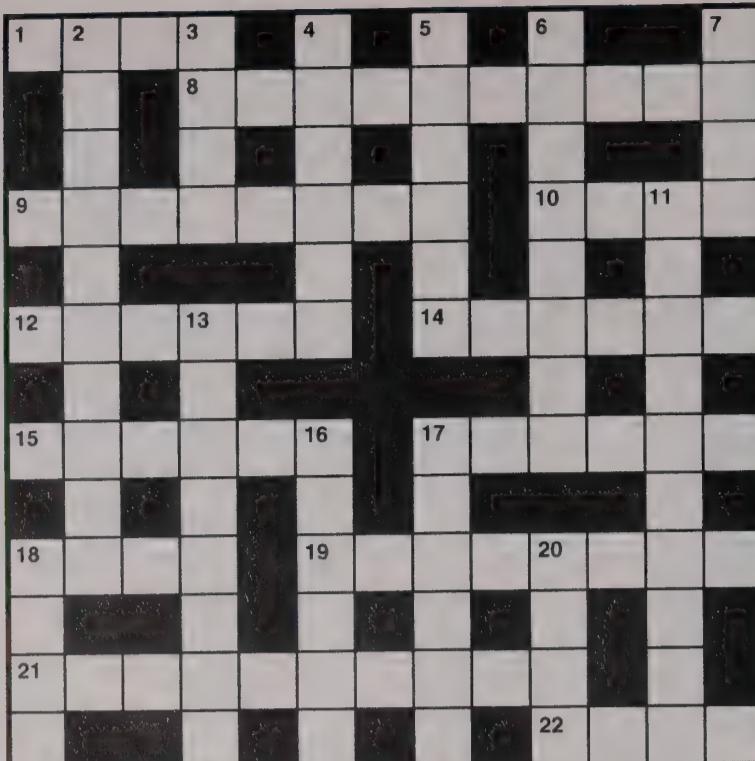


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ACROSS

- Open (4)
- Act of killing someone painlessly (10)
- Capital of Queensland (8)
- Long, pointed tooth of an elephant (4)
- See 7 Down
- This country sends Britain a massive Christmas tree every year (6)
- Foxes named after one of Santa's reindeer? (6)
- Port in northern France (6)
- Mischiefous, small creatures with magical powers (4)
- Large pack carried on the back (8)
- The Sun* was criticised for its reporting of this boxer's mental health problems (5,5)
- Practical intelligence (4)

DOWN

- There are very few disabled students on these university courses (10)
- Warren Beatty movie about the American Left in the early 20th Century (4)
- Tension or tiredness (6)
- Club in Liverpool associated with The Beatles (6)
- Poem or picture portraying country life (8)
- And 12 Across. Author of *The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time*, a novel about an autistic boy (4,6)
- Film about a racehorse and its visually-impaired jockey (10)
- Covering for a wound (8)
- Person who copied manuscripts before the invention of printing (6)
- Desert plant with spines but no leaves (6)
- Uncertain or doubtful (4)
- It is required for a White Christmas (4)

CROSSWORD BY JIM MCLAREN • ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMIE TROUNCE
ANSWERS ON PAGE 34

Candid Kate



Kate calls for peace on earth and goodwill to all turkeys



PPPPPPP, PPPPPPP. Pppp. As you see, the p on my computer keyboard is working after not working, which is wonderful, enabling me to use this article as a rallying call for my new revolutionary ideas.

As disability rights seems to be so good for all of us, it is (the) time to think about another group which has absolutely no human (or not) rights at this time of year.

Turkeys. The silent majority. Imagine being a turkey – the fear, the pain, the heat of the oven. And it is supposed to be the season of good will!

I bet some of our winged brothers are throwing stink bombs at organisations for turkeys run by chickens, who employ token turkeys to clean out the hay from the state of the art office.

Anyway, back to my life. Sorry for those of you that wanted to hear more about fat, ugly birds – which I am not (This is not a reference to the old Christmas tradition of pantomime. OH YES IT IS). I am quite thin, actually.

My plans for Christmas are being host to some of our cousins, whose hobbies are eating and having competitions between them about who could consume the most.

Usually, on Christmas day, me and mum whizz down the A something for 20 minutes, which is surprisingly easy and quick, to their house. But this year, old ma and pa and their three strapping lads will come over to ours somehow.

My mum has to do the cooking. She has got to lift the turkey, so she has started practising lifting our over-sized cat into the oven. As she's a mere mum and not an employee, nobody seems to make this into a BIG ISSUE. No worried people saying "You should not lift"; no offerings of hoists or anything – strange that. If you swap the turkey or the fat cat with a disabled kid, the situation won't change apart from me screaming "Don't put my little mate in the oven!"

But nowadays, unless you are a parent, you need 100 men who have had 10 years of training to lift the tiniest little child out of her wheelchair to go swimming, while her twin non-disabled brother is always having piggybacks from untrained people.

So, merry Christmas and happy New Year, and I hope it will be fairer to you turkeys and cooked fat cats.

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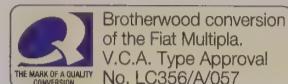


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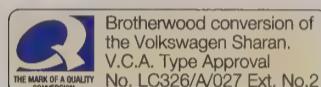
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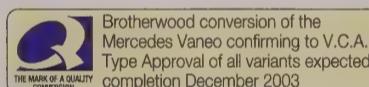
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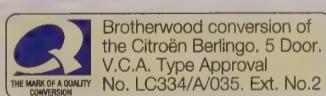
from £14,778.90

Low & Level floor (61" flat floor conversion) with 57" headroom.

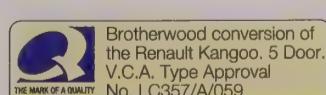


Peugeot Partner

from £14,778.90 Low & Level floor (61" flat floor conversion) with 57" headroom.



All Brotherwood converted vehicles are engineered to conform to V.C.A. Type Approval. Research and Development is part of every day business at Brotherwoods with stainless steel fuel tanks now added to all converted models having passed the latest stringent European tests.



Renault Kangoo from £15,731.46

Low & Level floor (61" flat floor conversion) with 58" headroom.

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Visit our website www.brotherwood.com for more information on our complete range of conversions

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What's on

The National Autistic Society (NAS) will benefit from the Stars Shine for Autism Christmas concert on 2 December. Jane Asher, President of NAS, will be joined by a host of celebrities for an evening of music and readings. St Paul's Church, Wilton Place, Knightsbridge. From 7pm. Tickets from £10. Tel: 020 7387 0031. www.theplace.org.uk

Publications

Disability Alliance has published a series of guides to help unemployed disabled people into work. Entitled *Moving into Work and Self-employment – why not*, the guides provide practical advice including information on benefits, tax credits and other assistance. From £3. Tel: 0207 247 8776. www.disabilityalliance.org

Website

Find out which businesses provide the access and facilities that you need without having to leave the house, by going to the **direct enquiries** website, the nationwide disabled access register. The website has been developed to allow both businesses and users to share information, and to enable businesses to meet the needs of their customers. Post your comments on the site directly to companies. www.directenquiries.com

CORRECTION

In our article on the **Independent Living Exhibition** in the November issue ('Home Improvements', page 23), we said that Hannah's new Model 310 can be used in temperatures between 10 and 40 degrees centigrade. It can actually be used between -10 and 40 degrees centigrade. We apologise for the confusion.

DID YOU KNOW? – **DN** is available on tape, disk and by e-mail. Contact Talking Newspapers, see **imprint**, page 2.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

ACROSS:

1. Ajar 8. Euthanasia 9. Brisbane
10. Tusk 12. Haddon 14. Norway
15. Vixens 17. Calais 18. Imps
19. Rucksack 19. Frank Bruno
22. Wits

DOWN:

2. Journalism 3. Reds 4. Strain
5. Cavern 6. Pastoral 7. Mark
11. Seabiscuit 13. Dressing
16. Scribe 17. Cactus 18. Iffy
20. Snow

ON LINEAGE

Tel: 020 7619 7320, Fax: 020 7619 7331, Minicom: 020 7619 7332, E-mail: info@scapa.org.uk

• Caravans/caravans

NISSAN VANETTE CARGO 2.3 Diesel, long wheel base. Blue. 26,500 miles. MOT to May 04. T reg, first registered 09.03.1999. Air Con. CD Radio. Full conversion for wheelchair user also seats four (inc driver). Excellent condition. £7,500 ono. Tel: 07818 038345.

CHAIRMAN RENAULT KANGOO Authentique Dci 1.5, diesel, reg Jan 03, 9k miles. Metallic blue, air con, electric windows/mirrors, abs, pas, folding ramp. Seat 3 plus wheelchair. Excellent condition, £11,000 ono. Tel (evenings): 01493 781135 (Great Yarmouth).

VW CARAVELLE 1.9 petrol, N reg, 49k miles, 6 seats plus wheelchair. Invatravel side conversion with manual ramp. Full MOT, only 2 owners. Vgc, £4,500 ono. Tel: 01902 344365.

FORD ESCORT AZURA 1.3 hatchback M reg 1995, 49k miles, with Constables electric carchair and hoist. Fsh, MOT and service expires Feb 04. Carries 3 incl driver. £2,500 ono. Tel: 01584 841665 (Shropshire).

R REG RENAULT Trafic, rear lift, five seats, 28k miles. Excellent condition. £4,850. Tel: 07734 108768.

RENAULT KANGOO 1.4, automatic, silver, 10k miles, 51 reg, warranty 'til December 04. Constables conversion incl ramp and winch. Rear sliding side doors with tail lift, carries 4 plus wheelchair. E/windows, air con, fsh, pas. In immaculate condition, £10,000 ono. Tel: 01582 623292.

CHAIRMAN FORD ESCORT 1299cc, petrol 1993, L reg, Gowrings conversion. MOT expires Sept 04, 4,100 miles, seat 2 plus wheelchair. £3,000 offers – must be seen. Tel: 01536 483760 (Northants).

BLUE CORSA 1.4, auto, 1998, 64k miles, 1 owner, fsh, MOT 06/04. Push/pull hand controls £2,500. Tel: 01323 840672.

VOLKSWAGEN SHARAN 1.9TDI, manual, metallic green, X reg, 37k miles, Brotherwood conversion which includes ramp access at rear for wheelchair, power steering, air con, optional integral child seat. £15,500. Tel: 01452 380443.

CHAIRMAN CITROEN BERLINGO, T reg, 13k miles, green. Only 1 owner, pas, hoist and ramp, seat 4 plus wheelchair. In immaculate condition, cost £9,200 with conversion, £6,995 ono. Tel: 01304 619333 (Kent).

Cont'd pg 38

Disability Equality Trainers

Improving the quality of registered childminding is a key objective at the National Childminding Association. But providing clear pathways for childminders to develop their professional skills and qualifications is only part of what we do. We also promote equality in every aspect of our service, and that means giving our childminders the knowledge and tools to deal effectively with issues of disability within the community.

So who better to contribute to this goal than you?

Join us as a self-employed Disability Equality Trainer and you will help us make the social model of disability a reality by delivering equality training within our existing programmes. This will involve working with groups of childminders, using your participative and practical training style to give them the knowledge and skills to deliver our social inclusion objectives within their own homes.

Along with the insight you've gained as a result of your own disability, you will ideally have an NVQ level 3 training qualification and experience of teaching adults. You will also need a good understanding of anti-discriminatory policy and practice, an interest in home-based childcare, and a real desire to influence and educate the next generation of childminders. You should also be available to attend a briefing on either 28th January or 6th February 2004.

Ready to make a bigger difference? Then discover more by visiting www.careers-at-ncma.org.uk. Alternatively you can telephone 01722 340677 for an information pack. We value diversity in our workplace and welcome applications from all sections of the community.

We would also like to hear from you if you are interested in developing your skills to become a Disability Equality Trainer. See our website for more information.

Making equality happen.
Making equality count



www.careers-at-ncma.org.uk



**Commissioner for the
Disability Rights Commission**

DWP

Department for
Work and Pensions



The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions invites applications from suitably qualified candidates with a proven track record in a business environment to fill one Commissioner (non-executive director) vacancy due to arise in April 2004 on the Board of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC).

The DRC is an independent statutory body, established by the Disability Rights Commission Act 1999 and sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions, to work towards the elimination of discrimination against disabled people.

Applicants will have: a sound understanding of and a commitment to disability equality; a proven track record in a business environment either as an employer or as a representative of employers; the capacity to operate immediately as a Board member at national level; a demonstrable profile and record of achievement within their profession and/or area of work and excellent interpersonal and communication skills.

Applicants will be expected to spend at least 20 days a year on Commission business. They will receive a daily fee (presently set at £142) and payment for travel and other expenses.

Applications are particularly welcome from disabled people, women and members of minority ethnic groups.

The Department for Work and Pensions is committed to making appointments on merit by fair and open processes, taking account of equal opportunities.

For further information and to apply on-line please visit www.capitaras.co.uk and select the Disability Rights Commission icon. Alternatively please write to Capita RAS, Innovation Court, New Street, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 7JB or telephone 0870 169 9723 (24 hours) or textphone 0870 169 9734. Please quote reference B7431. Closing date 6th January 2004.

A copy of this advertisement and the recruitment pack are available on request in Braille, Easy Read, on audio tape, in large print and in Welsh.

CAPITA RAS
www.capitaras.co.uk

• Recruitment (on pages 34 to 39)

The University of Kent frequently recruits for clerical assistants, technicians and IT assistants, administrative staff, research and lecturing staff across our faculties.

Staff who have a disability are currently under-represented and we wish to improve the diversity of our workforce

The University is a member of the double tick pledge and will interview all applicants who meet the essential criteria.

For information about our vacancies please check our recruitment website

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/registry/personnel/vacancies.htm>.

For details in different formats, please apply to The Personnel Department. Textphone users please phone

01227 824145.

We actively promote equal opportunity in education and employment and welcome applicants from all sections of the community.

KENT
UNIVERSITY OF KENT



Innovative



Dynamic



Proactive



Inspirational



Committed



Focused



Disabled [**✓**] **by society**

That's right, we are looking for a disabled person to be our new Executive Director of Diversity and Corporate Planning. Because we believe that only a disabled person can credibly lead Scope's corporate policy on disability issues, ensuring equality and opportunities for all disabled people.

Here at Scope we are fully committed to helping people with all kinds of impairments overcome the barriers that prevent them from achieving their potential. We are determined that disabled people succeed at all levels throughout Scope. We want to change the way that people in our organisation think. And then we want to change the way people outside our organisation think, act and respond.

In short, our new Executive Director of Diversity and Corporate Planning will be the strategic driving force and change agent behind this. Informing us, influencing us, guiding us. You will be a leadership model, supporting disabled people as staff and in other roles. This pivotal role has the full support of Scope as a whole, from the trustees down to every level of the organisation.

Above all, we see diversity and corporate planning as going hand in hand, so that diversity is built in every step of the way as we shape the progressive, supportive Scope of the future.

"I now believe that the organisation is serious about making Scope a fully inclusive place to work, this development validates the concerns that I and other disabled members of staff have raised, and it really excites me."

Barry Hayward, Disabled Person - Scope Manager

"I'm looking forward to the shattering of glass as the ceiling goes for disabled people who can make a strategic difference."

Mark Leach, Disabled Person - Scope Community Fieldworker

"This role is integral to shaping Scope, so that we model equality in practice in all aspects of what we do."

Tony Manwaring, Chief Executive

First of all, you will take control of 'Diversity Works', our Diversity Initiative, and make sure it promotes real change both within and outside the organisation. You will be working with major companies committed to diversity. You will also play a key role in corporate business planning, performance monitoring, quality and stakeholder management and in handling complex relationships. Above all, you will be instrumental in creating an environment of opportunity, encouragement and empowerment for all.

You will need to have strategic experience at the highest level, possibly with a track record of contributing to the disability rights agenda and helping to plan for and achieve change within a complex organisation. This critical position needs a dynamic person who can inspire and lead others and only those who relish a tough challenge should apply.

Obviously, we are totally committed to making this work. So we will make sure you have every opportunity to make it work. You will be asked how you will need your role to be organised so that you can be successful. This could include flexible and combined office/home working, along with IT, transport arrangements and other specific support.

And you'll give us your knowledge of strategic planning at a senior corporate level and the ability to translate your experience of life as a disabled person into driving change within Scope and beyond.

For a candidate information pack, which is available in different formats, please call 0870 241 9031. (or minicom 0115 950 9491). Please quote reference SC/DN.

For an informal discussion please contact our retained consultants Rashpal Kaur Singh or Julie Towers of Tribal GWT on 020 7323 7190.

Closing date for receipt of applications is 19th December 2003.

Scope is a registered charity number 208231.

Director of Diversity & Corporate Planning

up to £70,000

Do you have the qualities to prove Diversity Works?

TRIBAL
GWT

www.tribalgwt.com

SCOPE
equality for disabled people

Dear DN reader, if you have a disability and Internet access could you please complete our short

holiday questionnaire. Your views are important to us.

Please log on to: www.tourismsoutheast.com/ap/ap.htm

Thank you, A. Reid, Development Mgr.

• Holidays

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Charming cottage in Dordogne region available for rent. Reasonable rates. If you are looking for peace and quiet, warm weather, good food and wine, this is the place for you. Call or fax Ed Passant on 01233 731 097 or e-mail: ed.passant@mail.com web: www.accessholidays.com

ALGARVE - PORTUGAL

Lots of villas, farmhouses, bungalows, hotels, B&B, car hire with hand controls, adapted vans and plenty to see and do. Contact: David Player Tel: 00 351 289 393636 Fax: 00 351 289 397448 E-mail: dave@player.pt

www.player.pt

BE NEXT TO THE SEA AT HEYSHAM

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Holiday Cottages designed for wheelchair users and their families. Rural setting with superb views. Dogs welcome. Wood burning stoves and daily meal service. Please ring or write for colour brochure. R&N Hall, Penrose Burden, St Beward, Bodmin, Cornwall PL30 4LZ. Telephone Bodmin (01208) 850277 or 850617

Brittany Cottage to let. Adapted for wheelchair use. Good access to beaches. Sleeps up to 6. Details **C. Hodgson**. Tel (01924) 499220.

Near Salisbury - newly converted stable block self-catering units. Ground floor 1 double/twin bedroom en-suite wheel-in shower. Upstairs 1 double, 1 single, shower room. Open plan kitchen & living room. Patio & shared garden. ETB category 2, 4-star highly commended. Non-smoking. Prices from £195 pw. Available all year. Tel: 01722 349002, e-mail: mail@old-stables.co.uk, www.old-stables.co.uk

The Algarve, Portugal

Small hotel owned and run by English family. Home from home. Happy and friendly. Home cooked food. Diets catered for. All bedrooms en-suite. Our own swimming pool and grass bowling green. Golfing bookings can be made. We are fully equipped for wheelchair users, their families and friends. Met at Faro airport. For brochures and flights with A.T.O.L. agents, tel: 00 351 289 396589, fax: 00 351 289 394924.

Norfolk, Nar Valley Holiday Cottages

3 self-catering, all wheelchair accessible, 1 with wheel-in shower room, 2 with airbaths. Mostly en-suite. On working farm - peaceful location, central for beaches and tourist attractions. Indoor heated swimming pool. Also B&B.

More details and prices, contact: Rosemary on 01760 338797.

South of France winter sun, Carcassonne, Cathar Castles, fully accessible bungalow sleeps 3 or 4. English owner next door. For brochure call 01953 452145 or 00 33 468 78 87 61.

TOURISM SOUTH EAST

• Recruitment (on pages 34 to 39)

OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE

Training & Membership Manager

Circa £35,000

The Valuation Tribunal Service (VTS) seeks to appoint a Training & Membership Manager. The VTS is a new Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) that will be launched on 1 April 2004. Before 1 April 2004 appointments will be made in a shadow capacity. The main purpose of the new Service will be to provide central administrative support and procedural advice to the existing 56 Valuation Tribunals in England. Between them, the 56 Valuation Tribunals employ around 160 staff and have a budget of approximately £10m. Valuation Tribunals hear appeals against valuations for business rates (including penalties imposed for non provision of information for assessment from 1 April 2004), valuations and liability for council tax and drainage rates.

The role:

- Advising the Corporate Director on all training and Tribunal membership issues.
- Consideration of regulatory and legislative issues as they apply to training and membership, and undertaking consultation where changes are sought.
- Preparation and consultation on procedural guidance to help spread best practice.
- Developing and maintaining a database of training skills, needs and analysis.
- Delivery of a staff and member training policy and programme.

The candidate will have:

- Excellent oral and written communication and presentation skills.
- A proven background in training and an ability to develop and implement programmes.
- Good understanding of maintaining a regulatory regime.
- Experience or knowledge of working with volunteers.
- Good inter-personal skills particularly influencing.
- Appreciation of how training can underpin a corporate identity.

The Training & Membership Manager will have a very important role within the new VTS. You will be the conduit between the lay valuation tribunal

membership and the administrative VTS and also responsible for policy on staff training. You will be enthusiastic and energetic and able to understand and represent the different perspectives of the judicial and administrative partnership. You will be able to work alone as well as in the small Head Office team, to be based in London. You will need to be able to recognise where development areas exist, either in tribunal members or staff, and to be able to arrange or provide training to fill those. The key objective in the initial period will be to support the Corporate Director in his role of assisting the Chief Executive in developing and directing the new body and creating a consistent culture and identity across the service.

The Terms:

This will be a full-time position from 1 April 2004, but prior to this and, subject to the candidate's availability, the post will be as either full or part-time consultant to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The full-time post will attract a starting salary of around £35,000 per annum. A pro rata salary will be agreed for the period up to 1 April 2004.

For further information and an application form, please visit the website at www.odpm.gov.uk or contact Geoff Salvatore, Zone 5/J2, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU. Tel: 020 7944 4236. E-mail geoff.salvatore@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

The information pack and application form are available in a number of formats such as Braille or large print, etc. Please let us know if an alternative format would be helpful to you.

The closing date for this appointment is **12 December 2003**. Late applications will not be accepted.

The Valuation Tribunal Service is committed to seeking candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds and taking full account of equal opportunities. Applications are particularly welcome from women, minority ethnic and disabled candidates.



Equata is seeking an experienced Administrative Manager to share responsibility for the south west's regional Disability Arts agency alongside the Artistic Manager. Starting April 2004 (possibly earlier). Salary up to £21,000 (f/t). Closing date: Friday 5 December Interviews

Monday 15 December. Disabled people especially welcome to apply - please state your preferred format.

For application pack please contact: 01884 829265 (voice); 01884 829267 (textphone) or e-mail info@equata.co.uk

• For Sale

WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES FOR SALE

2002 02 Mercedes Vito, 112 CDi, Auto, 1 owner, tail lift, 10,000 miles	£16,750
2001 Y Peugeot Expert Constables, 25,000 miles, 4 seats	£12,500
2000 W Renault Espace Hill Grau, 9,000 miles, A/C	£18,995
2000 W VW LWB, Side lift, 32,000 miles	£12,750
2000 V Sharan Automotive TDi, 2 owners, 11,000 miles, A/C	£13,995
1999 V Peugeot Expert TD Hill Grace, 5+ chair A/C	£12,500
1999 V Escort Chairman diesel, 44,000 miles, PAS, 1 owner	£8,750
1999 T Mercedes Vito, 180CDi, Traveliner, side lift	£11,495
1999 T Suzuki Wagon R, Auto, 1 owner, 30,000 miles	£7,495
1998 S Sharan Brotherwood TDi, raised roof, 1 owner, 62,000 miles, A/C	£14,995
1998 S VW TD, with Tail lift, 42,000 miles	£8,750
1998 R Ford Courier Auto, P.A.S. Universal, 2 owners, 11,000 miles	£6,995
1998 R Mercedes Sprinters, with tail lifts, low mileage diesels	from £12,995
1997 R Toyota Hiace Petrol, 1 owner, 53,000 miles, lift	£8,250
1996 P VW Caravelle Chairman, Auto, 73,000 miles	£9,500
1996 N Nissan Serene Chairman 1.6, 8,000 miles	£7,750
1993 L Vanette Versa 1.5, Tail lift, 50,000 miles	£3,495
1989 G Brotherwood Prairie SLX, Auto, 80,000 miles	£5,250
Kangoo & Berlingo models	Choice of 9
Trafic & Vanette Cargo models	Choice of 12

A selection of 60 WAVs from £2,750 fully serviced with warranty. Demo and delivery anywhere in UK mainland free. Part exchange and vehicles sought for purchase.

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Photos: jeremyrendell.com and nickdavid.com

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And, with many more opportunities expected to arise during the next 12 months, we will be looking for like minded people to join us and be part of the solution as we continue our campaign to end homelessness.

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We specialise in locating used vehicles to suit the specific needs of our customers. If you are looking for an accessible vehicle or have one to dispose of, contact Adam Price. We also supply and install all forms of access equipment.

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adamprice.avr@tiscali.co.uk

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New and Nearly New, Electric Wheelchairs,
3 and 4 Wheel Scooters.
All models wanted and for sale.

Ring Free anytime

0800 074 6834

All major credit cards accepted

Mercedes Vito, 2 litre petrol, auto, air con, tints, central locking etc. Fully converted, 2 rear seats, wheelchair ramp and tracking. Low mileage, ex demo vehicle. Can be converted into 'Drive-from-Wheelchair' with auto lift, powered tailgate etc. From: £9875-00.

Please contact Interbility Ltd on 01438 747448 and ask for Ron or Bob.

STICKERS

Send for free booklet on stickers and other useful aids for disabled

NEW BLUE BADGE + TIME CLOCK HOLDER



COST £5.50
FOR PAIR

GPSP Ltd. PO Box 25, Portishead BS20 6N
Tel: 01275 842322 gpsp.bristol@lineone.net



Will you be my Valentine?

For £10 your Valentine message will feature in Disability Now February 2004. Maximum 20 words. Send a Cheque / postal order payable to Disability Now by 13th January 2004. Send to Patrick, Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW.



OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE

Planning & Development Manager

Circa £40,000

The Valuation Tribunal Service (VTS) seeks to appoint a Planning & Development Manager. The VTS is a new Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) that will be launched on 1 April 2004. Before 1 April 2004 appointments will be made in a shadow capacity. The main purpose of the Service will be to provide central administrative support and procedural advice to the existing 56 Valuation Tribunals in England. Between them, the 56 Valuation Tribunals employ around 160 staff and have a budget of approximately £10m. Valuation Tribunals hear appeals against valuations for business rates (including penalties imposed for non provision of information for assessment from 1 April 2004), valuations and liability for council tax and drainage rates.

The role:

- Advising on strategic planning and the development of corporate issues.
- Maintaining VTS legislation and advising on legal, structural and strategy issues.
- Devising, implementing and maintaining a communications strategy.
- Devising and maintaining a media plan, and as contact point for media and stakeholder organisations.
- Undertaking corporate projects and consultation exercises.
- Lead role in devising and implementing customer care initiatives.
- VTS Board secretariat.

The candidate will have:

- Excellent written, oral and presentational skills.
- Experience or knowledge of business and corporate planning systems.
- Proven inter-personal and negotiating skills.
- An understanding of Local Government legislation.
- Ability to work as an individual or as part of a small team.
- Experience of customer care policy.
- Previous experience or knowledge of Investors in People (IiP).

The Planning & Development Manager will have an important role to play in the new VTS.

You will be enthusiastic and energetic, able to take the initiative to work alone but also as a flexible team player in the small Head Office team, to be based in London. You will have experience of corporate planning and an understanding of local Government, and will be able to reflect different views from around the VTS in your advice to the Corporate Director. Your responsibilities will overlap those of the Corporate Director and you will need to work very closely with him/her. Once in post a division of responsibilities will be agreed depending on your respective skills sets, to allow you both to have discrete areas of work. Your key objective in the initial period will be to assist the Corporate Director in his role of supporting the Chief Executive in developing and directing the new VTS and to creating a consistent culture and identity across the service.

The Terms:

This will be a full-time position from 1 April 2004, but prior to this and, subject to the candidate's availability, the post will be as either full or part-time consultant to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The full-time post will attract a starting salary of around £40,000 per annum. A pro rata salary will be agreed for the period up to 1 April 2004.

For further information and an application form, please visit the website at www.odpm.gov.uk or contact Geoff Salvatore, Zone 5/J2, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU. Tel: 020 7944 4236. E-mail geoff.salvatore@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

The information pack and application form are available in a number of formats such as Braille or large print, etc. Please let us know if an alternative format would be helpful to you.

The closing date for this appointment is **12 December 2003**. Late applications will not be accepted.

The Valuation Tribunal Service is committed to seeking candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds and taking full account of equal opportunities. Applications are particularly welcome from women, minority ethnic and disabled candidates.



Account Manager

Up to £35,000
+ Bonus + Car

South Wales &
South West England
Home Based - Ideally
Bristol Area

Remploy is a leading national organisation, providing an unusually diverse range of services and products, generating revenues of over £200 million per year. Proud of being the UK's largest provider of employment opportunities for disabled people, we enjoy a well established and growing customer base, that comprises many world class companies.

Remploy Managed Services

Opportunity & Enterprise - Working Together



South Tyneside Council



Moving towards a better future

The Spirit of South Shields by Irene Brown

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Access Officer

(Strategic and Regulatory Services)

£21,282 - £22,689 pa

We are looking for an enthusiastic person with sound knowledge and experience of access issues and standards to help develop strategic policies and provide best practice advice on accessibility.

You should have a degree or equivalent qualification in a building or development control/planning discipline, at least 2 years relevant experience of designing accessible environments and be able to interpret plans. An in-depth knowledge of the Disability Discrimination Act and an awareness of the issues facing people with disabilities is essential.

With effective verbal and written communication skills, you will be able to prepare reports and disseminate information to others through presentation and discussion. There will be both office and outside work and a full current driving licence or access to a means of mobility support is essential for which a casual car user allowance is payable.

For an informal discussion please contact Alan French, Head of Strategic and Regulatory Services on (0191) 424 7402 or Debbie Cassidy, East Team Leader on (0191) 424 7404.

Application forms are available from the Head of Human Resources, Town Hall and Civic Offices, Westoe Road, South Shields, Tyne and Wear NE33 2RL, Tel. (0191) 455 4968 or jobs@s-tyneside-mbc.gov.uk to be returned by Noon on Thursday 4 December 2003. BT Typetalkers welcome.

We are committed to equality of opportunities and actively encourage applications from all sectors of the community

www.southtyneside.info or www.sector1.net for more vacancies within this organisation



• Course

LEADING THE WAY n w d a f

LEADING THE WAY – Arts Workshop Leaders Course for Disabled and Deaf Artists. January 2004—6 Month course

Leading the Way is a Higher Education, part-time training course specifically designed to train Disabled and Deaf people in Workshop Leading skills.

NORTH WEST DISABILITY ARTS FORUM (NWDAF) is looking for Disabled and/or Deaf arts practitioners of any art form who would like to train as and become a **Workshop Leader**.

The next course runs from January to June 2004, 10am – 4pm at **LIVERPOOL INSTITUTE FOR PERFORMING ARTS (LIPA)** and will be followed by a placement with a community arts organization.

The course aims to cover three topics:

- Arts Workshop Skills
- Running Inclusive Workshops
- Disability and Deaf arts and Cultural Diversity.

Successful students will receive a Certificate of Professional Development from John Moores University.

NB: The course is FREE and all access needs will be provided for. A transport or childcare bursary is also available for North West students.

If you are interested in taking part in this unique course please contact: NWDAF, MPAC Building, 1-27 Bridport Street, Liverpool, L3 5QF. Tel: 0151 707 1733; Fax: 0151 708 9355; Text: 0151 706 0365; Email: training@nwdaf.co.uk

Or visit our website:
www.nwdaf.co.uk

LIPA

• Accommodation

Accessible or adapted property to sell or let?
Searching for accessible or adapted property?

The Accessible Property Register
'Bringing accessible property into the mainstream'. Tel: 0114 2307058, web: www.accessible-property.org.uk

DISCLAIMER – DN is not responsible for claims made in the adverts it prints. Readers are advised to check claims with advertisers before relying on them.

DEADLINES

Disability Now January 2004 published

20 December classified deadlines:

Booking: 5 December.

Copy: 9 December.

• Recruitment (on pages 34 to 39)

OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE

Human Resources Manager

Circa £40,000

The Valuation Tribunal Service (VTS) seeks to appoint a Human Resources Manager. The VTS is a new Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) that will be launched on 1 April 2004. Before 1 April 2004 appointments will be made in a shadow capacity. The main purpose of the Service will be to provide central administrative support and procedural advice to the existing 56 Valuation Tribunals in England. Between them, the 56 Valuation Tribunals employ around 160 staff and have a budget of approximately £10m. Valuation Tribunals hear appeals against valuations for business rates (including penalties imposed for non provision of information for assessment from 1 April 2004), valuations and liability for council tax and drainage rates.

The Role:

- Advising the Resources Director on all human resource issues.
- Assisting in the development of a human resources strategy to meet the needs of the VTS and its 160 staff spread across 26 locations in England.
- Implementing human resources legislation and policy throughout the service ensuring there is a consistent approach to recruitment, promotion, pay, leave and grievances.
- Developing performance management policy and guidelines for all staff.
- Working level contact for communications and negotiations with unions and staff.

The candidate will have:

- Excellent communication skills.
- An extensive professional background in HR, and of developing and implementing human resource systems.
- An ability to show initiative and to work as part of a small dynamic team.
- Professional human resources qualifications and an extensive knowledge of employment legislation and rights, contract negotiation, Equal Opportunities and Investors in People.
- Good inter-personal and negotiating skills.

The Human Resources Manager will play a key role in bringing the new VTS together through helping to develop and implement consistent human resources policies. You will be enthusiastic and energetic, able to work in the small Head Office team, to be based in London, but also able to inspire respect across the regionally diverse tribunals. You will apply your experience of human resources creatively but sensibly and will assist the Resources Director to support the Chief Executive in his objective to develop and direct the new body and to create a consistent culture and identity across the service.

The Terms:

This will be a full-time position from 1 April 2004, but prior to this and, subject to the candidate's availability, the post will be as either full or part-time consultant to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The full-time post will attract a starting salary of around £40,000 per annum. A pro rata salary will be agreed for the period up to 1 April 2004.

For further information and an application form, please visit the website at www.odpm.gov.uk or contact Geoff Salvatore, Zone 5/J2, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU. Tel: 020 7944 4236. E-mail geoff.salvatore@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

The information pack and application form are available in a number of formats such as Braille or large print, etc. Please let us know if an alternative format would be helpful to you.

The closing date for this appointment is **12 December 2003**. Late applications will not be accepted.

The Valuation Tribunal Service is committed to seeking candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds and taking full account of equal opportunities. Applications are particularly welcome from women, minority ethnic and disabled candidates.

**DN next month**

All the best news, views, jobs and offers. On sale 18 December.

HOLIDAY TIME

Skiing in Scotland, visiting Switzerland and a survey of specialist travel insurers are among the delights of DN's first feature in a series of three.

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

"Disabled people" or "people with disabilities"? Rod Hermiston tackles that and much more.

EQUIPPED FOR SUCCESS

New series: the Disabled Living Foundation answers popular questions about equipment.

THAT WAS THE YEAR...

DN highlights the goings on in 2003

CHAIRMAN RENAULT KANGOO 1.4 auto, 03 reg. Only 6 months' old, 900 miles. Vgc, £11,500 ono. Tel: 020 8349 2125.

VW MULTIVAN WITH hand controls, power steering cruise control, under-floor lift electronic sliding door. Regularly serviced and maintained 58,000 miles T reg. Other features include up to seven passengers or 4 wheelchair users. Back seat transforms into a bed. Small table in the rear and powerpoints for fridge cooker etc. A great adaptable van £9,500 buys it or make me an offer. Emigrating is the reason for sale. Please call seller on 0121 247 4424 for more information. Or email alanholdsworth@blueyonder.co.uk for photos.

• Wheelchairs/scooters

STORM ELECTRIC WHEELCHAIR with lift, shopping bag, kerb climber. Regularly maintained, still insured. With charger, 18-20 miles on full charge, max speed 5 mph. £250 ono. Tel: 01323 727696 (Eastbourne).

LIGHTWEIGHT OTTO BOCK Start Plus wheelchair in anthracite, 18" wide. Cost £550 less than a year ago, £300 ono. Tel: 01286 673680.

FREEDOM WORLDWIDE WHEELCHAIR, manual, seat 16" x 15". Used twice, cost £450, asking £250 ono. Tel: 020 8679 4470.

SHOPRIDER SUNRUNNER 3, three wheel red scooter with basket. Together with battery charger and full instruction manual. Hardly used, £590. Tel: 0113 2556763 (Leeds).

QUICKIE 2 LIGHTWEIGHT wheelchair with seat raiser and Flotec pressure relieving cushion. Never been used. £490 ono. Tel: 01788 562157 (Rugby).

TI SPORTS TITANIUM wheelchair, very light. 17" square seat, collapsible. Removable arm rests and pedals. Quick release wheels. Hardly used, cost £3,000, accept £950. Suntec collapsible wheelchair. Brand new, cost £400, accept £100. Autochair, fits on any car, runs off the battery, lifts or rises for wheelchair access. Cost £3,000 in April 03, asking £1,450. Tel: 01204 401629 or 07732 968643.

ENIGMA POWERCHAIR, BRAND new with guarantees, conventional proven design, fully adjustable so most disabilities catered for £1599 Inc VAT. Details and brochure, tel: 01205 361953.

RAMPS, STRONG LIGHT aluminium, collapsible for easy transit. Extending to 5'. £99, Extending to 7' £169.99. Tel for details: 01205 361953.

• Household/family

LAZY-BOY CHAIR, stand up/sit down, any position, full head to toe massage. Just over 2 years old, in excellent condition, cost £1,700. £300 ono. Tel: 01737 556094.

WESTHOLME STRAIGHT CEILING track hoist (4.5 metres). One careful owner. £450 ono. Tel: 01623 550621 (Nottinghamshire).

AQUATEC FORTUNA BATH lift – battery-operated bath seat with reclining back. Comfortable, white mesh removable/washable covers. Excellent condition, only used for 9 months. £400. Richmond riser/recliner chair – smaller size, cushioned back, choice of leg-rest and recliner positions. Very comfortable & vgc. Fabric cover in subdued flower pattern, soft pink/blue. Only used for 8 months. £700. Tel: 01908 564185 (Milton Keynes).

2 STAIRLIFTS, BOTH standard flight 13 risers. Stannah 230 left hand 1997 swivel chair. Meditec left hand, Infrar remote, swivel chair. Both with back-up + safety features + professional refurbished, £800 each. Prices include fitting. Tel: 01483 728680 (Surrey).

SHOWER TOILET CHILTERN 100, front entry with fixed ramp. Good condition, £200 ono. Tel day: 020 7009 5173. Evening: 01923 223473

• Wanted

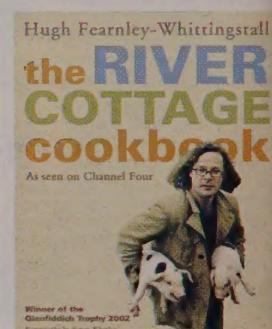
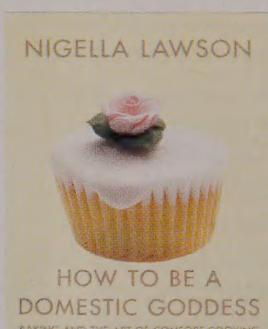
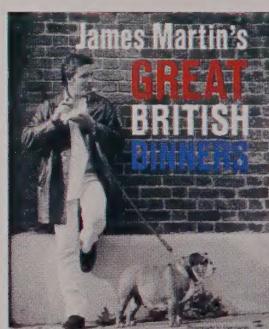
ROOFTOP HOIST, BRAUM or similar, semi automatic. Tel: 01845 578030.

• Bicycles/Tricycles

CHILD'S SPECIAL NEEDS trike, for 6-10 years old. Theraplay. Excellent condition. Cost £450 new, accept £200 ono. Tel: 01786 821606 (Central Scotland).

• All Terrain Vehicles

OFF ROAD BUGGIES, twin seater dual control, purpose built for special needs groups or individuals of all ages. All three in top condition, low maintenance. New £15,000, asking £3,500 each. For more information, tel: 01304 202244 (Kent) or mobile: 079 444 06665.

FESTIVE FUN

For all the budding chefs out there, Waterstone's has just the thing to get you in the festive mood. DN has four cook books to give away covering traditional favourites and festive family feasts, sumptuous dinners and indulgent desserts. Learn how to be a Domestic Goddess with Nigella Lawson, cook up a feast with James Martin's *Great British Dinners*, go back to your roots with Tom Norrington-Davies' *Just Like Mother Used to Make* or grow, gather and cook food from scratch with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's *River Cottage Cookbook*.

And this is just a small selection of the fabulous new food and drink titles Waterstone's have this holiday season. For more information call 020 8742 3800 or visit www.waterstones.co.uk

For your chance to win one of the above titles tick "Books" in the entry form.

W
WATERSTONE'S

• Public Appointment

OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

VALUATION TRIBUNAL SERVICE

Appointment of Deputy Chair and Members

The Deputy Prime Minister seeks to appoint a Deputy Chair and five members to a new Non Departmental Public Body, the Valuation Tribunal Service (VTS). The Local Government Act 2003 provides that the majority of members of the VTS will be Valuation Tribunal (VT) presidents or chairs. This means that four of the advertised positions will be filled by presidents or chairs.

The main purpose of the VTS will be to provide administrative support and procedural advice to the 56 valuation tribunals in England. Valuation tribunals hear appeals against valuations for business rates and valuations and liability for council tax.

The appointments may initially be as consultants working for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, but they will be formally appointed to the new VTS when it is launched. That is planned for 1 April 2004.

The Deputy Chair

The successful candidate will need to have a proven track record in successfully leading and managing organisations and will have excellent communication skills. He or she will have a key role in supporting the Chair in ensuring that the Service fulfils its statutory obligations and deputising as required.

The Members

The successful candidates will have experience of operating at a strategy level and particularly in setting the vision and business objectives for public or private organisations. Members should also have the ability to take the policy lead in specific areas.

All candidates should demonstrate the following essential criteria:

- Excellent communication skills.
- Leadership and strategic skills.
- Evidence of the ability to set, monitor, review and achieve objectives.
- Probity, independence and impartiality.

In addition, members should demonstrate one or more of the following attributes:

- Government accounting or financial skills.
- Experience of administrative justice or procedures.
- A business acumen.
- Experience of a customer focused environment.
- Estates management.
- Experience of delivery and development of IT strategies.
- Knowledge of training and development policy.

It is envisaged that the Deputy Chair post will require a time input of around 20 days per year and the members about 12-15 days per year. These posts will attract a gross payment of £250 per day.

For further information and an application form, please visit the website at www.odpm.gov.uk or contact Geoff Salvatore, Zone 5/J2, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU. Tel: 020 7944 4236. E-mail: geoff.salvatore@odpm.gsi.gov.uk. The information pack and the application form are available in a number of formats such as Braille or large print etc. Please let us know if an alternative format would be helpful to you.

The closing date for applications for these appointments is **9 January 2004**. Late applications will not be accepted.

The Deputy Prime Minister is committed to appointing on merit, seeking candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds and taking full account of equal opportunities. Applications are particularly welcome from women, minority ethnic and disabled candidates who are under-represented at this level in public life.



to enter

Tick the competition circle below, add your details, and send FOR

FREE to *Disability Now*, Freepost WD4323, London N7 9BR, or you can fax it on 020 7619 7331, or e-mail the details to: elizabeth.cowley@scope.org.uk

Books Hamper Toys Tickets



terms & conditions

- closing date for entrants: 17.12.03
- Entrants must be over 18
- No proof of purchase required
- UK entrants only
- No cash

alternatives • Winners notified by post • Editor's decision is final • Special offers not open to *DN* staff or associates • Winners may be announced in *DN* • In association with The Royal Shakespeare Company, Waitrose, Waterstones and Woolworths. We may use your name and address for further marketing purposes. Please tick the box if you do not wish your details to be included

EAT, DRINK, BE MERRY



To help you celebrate Christmas in style this year, *DN* has teamed up with Waitrose to offer you the chance to win a Waitrose Celebration Hamper. We have two to give away, worth £150 each. Packed with a selection of seasonal delicacies from rich brandy cake to champagne, this special hamper is perfect for celebrating the festive season at home.

Tick "Hamper" in the entry form for your chance to win. To find out about the full range of Waitrose Direct gifts visit www.waitrose.com

Waitrose



HO HO HO!



Santa has been to Woolworths for some great stocking-filers this Christmas. *DN* has two fantastic toys to give away, a *Boohbah* (left) from the BBC Children's TV series and a *Buzz Off* game where you have to guide a ring around a wire without touching it.

For your chance to win one, just tick "Toys" in the entry form.

For more information about Woolworths' products call 0845 608 1102 or visit www.woolworths.co.uk

WOOLWORTHS

IT'S A GOOD SHOW

Win tickets to the RSC's production of *Beauty and the Beast*. This enchanting fable recounts the story of a young girl who leaves her beloved family to discover the mysteries of the glorious palace of the Beast. Travel with Beauty into a beguiling world of mechanical toy servants and

magical rooms, where carpets change colour with your thoughts and mirrors explode into butterflies. Let your imagination fly as you are transported from the formal grandeur of 18th century Paris to the splendour of the Beast's palace.

This new version of *Beauty and the Beast*, written and directed by Lawrence Boswell, is suitable for children aged 7 and over.

Thanks to The Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon, *DN* can offer three pairs of tickets, worth up to £88 each, and you can choose from the following performances:

- January 3 at 2.30pm* or January 9 at 7.15pm*
- January 30 at 7.15pm** or February 14 at 2.30pm**
- February 17 at 2.30pm***

* These performances will be audio described. ** These performances will be captioned. *** This performance will be signed by Anji Gregg.

For your chance to win just tick "Tickets" in the entry form and return it to our Freepost address.



BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

RSC

ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

Christmas special

Gifts, games and grub

Justice for survivors

New DN campaign



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